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University of California Black Alumni Series

Lionel Wilson

ATTORNEY, JUDGE, AND OAKLAND MAYOR

With an Introduction by
Professor Edward J. Blakely

Interviews Conducted by
Gabrielle Morris
in 1985, 1990

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Copy no. _____

San Francisco Examiner
January 29, 1998

Lionel Wilson, tenacious builder and Oakland's first black mayor

'A giant in . . . law and politics,' says political successor

By Zachary Coile
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

Friends and political rivals, former staffers and family members mourned the passing of Lionel Wilson, the soft-spoken former judge who dominated Oakland politics for more than a decade as the city's first black mayor.

Mr. Wilson, who warily agreed to run for mayor in 1977 and was even more reluctant to leave the post 14 years later, died Friday at his Oakland home after a 10-month battle with cancer. He was 82.

A centrist who sought unity above party politics, the three-term Democratic mayor was remembered for breaking color barriers and for his devotion to building Oakland's skyline.

Oakland Mayor Elihu Harris, who defeated him in a three-way race in 1991, praised his predecessor for opening up politics to minority politicians in the East Bay.

"Lionel Wilson, a giant both in law and politics, blazed trails over which many have followed, including myself," Harris said in a statement. "This is a tremendous loss for the city."

A highly private man, Mr. Wilson kept his illness hidden from all but his closest friends. His wife of many years, Dorothy, didn't announce his death, and some friends and family members found out about his passing through media inquiries.

The Alameda County coroner's office said the death was reported by his doctor Wednesday. He will be cremated Feb. 3.

Athletic, political skills

Born in New Orleans, he moved as a toddler to Oakland, a city that was almost as segregated as the South his parents left behind. A gifted student, he graduated from McClymonds High School in West Oakland at age 16.

Early on he showed an athletic prowess that belied his lean, 5-foot-7-inch frame. He played semi-pro basketball and two years of Negro League baseball. His brother Harold said a New York Yankees scout told him Lionel would have been signed by the team but for one fact: his race.

He later attended UC-Berkeley, where he earned bachelor's and master's degrees in economics before serving as an officer in the U.S. Army Air Corps in North Africa and Europe.

After graduating from Hastings College of Law, he became a civil rights lawyer. In 1960, he was appointed Alameda County's first black Municipal Court judge by Gov. Pat Brown. Four years later, he broke new ground again as the county's first black Superior Court judge.

Though initially reluctant, he was drafted into politics in 1977 in an attempt to wrest control of City Hall away from conservatives led by the powerful Knowland family, the one-time owners of the Oakland Tribune. He was swept into office by an odd coalition that included white liberals, Black Panther members and labor and business interests.

He immediately set out to rally a diverse community around a single goal: rebuilding the city, especially the downtown. With a talent for attracting federal aid, he began a construction spree that included a new City Center complex and the Convention Center.

"I think Lionel will be remembered for setting a pace, for being an African American man who broke color lines as Oakland's first black mayor, and for getting the development of downtown going again," said Wilson Riles Jr., a former Oakland councilmember.

Strong leader during '89 quake

The most pressing crisis of his office came during the 1989 Loma Prieta quake, which flattened much of Interstate 880 in West Oakland, killing 42 commuters.

"He was very much in charge, making sure assistance was being given to those who needed it," said Bill Patterson, a friend and consultant to Mr. Wilson. "He had already laid the groundwork for unity (in the city), and the people rallied around him."

He lost in a mayoral primary in 1992, mostly because of concerns about his age and his costly and unsuccessful bid to force the Los Angeles Raiders to return to Oakland.

Supervisor Mary King, his one-time chief of staff who was chair of his last two campaigns, remembered that while she and others wept, the mayor was stone-faced in defeat.

"He was like Muhammad Ali," King said. "You never want to see him lose a fight. Maybe he fought one too many."

In addition to his wife, he is survived by his brothers, Harold, Kermit, Julius and Warren; sister, Marie Anderson; sons, Robin, Lionel Jr. and Stephen; and several grandchildren. Services are being planned.

San Francisco Chronicle
January 29, 1998
page 1 of 3

Lionel Wilson, Ex-Mayor of Oakland, Dies

First black to hold post, he served three terms

By Rick DelVecchio
Chronicle Staff Writer

Former Oakland Mayor Lionel Wilson, a fiery competitor and compassionate judge who brought justice and opportunity to black residents who had felt shut out for generations, has died at his home.

Lionel Wilson

Wilson, Oakland's first black mayor, was 82 and had been suffering from cancer.

Wilson had not discussed his health even with close friends and family members, who were shocked yesterday when they got the news from the Alameda County Sheriff's Department.

Sergeant Jim Knudsen said a copy of a death certificate filed with the coroner's office showed that Wilson died of cancer Friday in his Montclair district home.

Wilson was born in New Orleans on March 4, 1915, and moved to Oakland with his family when he was 3. His career was shaped by the discrimination he experienced as a talented black man growing up in an era of segregation.

He was an excellent tennis, baseball and basketball player, but his athletic prime came a decade

From Page 1

before Jackie Robinson broke the color barrier, and he was denied opportunities in major league professional sports.

Instead, he graduated from the University of California at Berkeley, earned a degree from Hastings College of the Law and became a civil rights lawyer. In 1960, he became Alameda County's first black judge when Governor Edmund G. (Pat) Brown appointed him to the bench.

He was elected to the first of his three terms as mayor in 1977, ending a long reign of Republican control of Oakland City Hall. It was a turning point in Oakland's political history, coming at a time when whites were fleeing the city and blacks energized by the civil rights and anti-war movements were demanding a role in decision-making.

As mayor, he was a pioneer for affirmative action in local government, and used his skills as a negotiator to make a mark on the city's economy — the skyline of downtown Oakland, though still incomplete, is largely a result of his development and economic policies.

Tide Turned Against Him

Wilson easily won re-election in 1981 and 1985 but failed badly in his bid for a fourth term, finishing third in the primary in 1990. In part, he was defeated by the costs of his aggressive economic advocacy, as residents became irate over subsidies for downtown development and the city's pro sports teams.

Perhaps the greatest political damage to Wilson came at the hands of Raiders boss Al Davis. After the Raiders moved to Los Angeles in 1982, Oakland sued to take over the franchise on the grounds that the team was vital to the city's economy. The novel angle proved a loser in court, and the city had to put up millions in legal fees.

In 1989, Wilson supported a plan to lure back the Raiders with taxpayer subsidies. A powerful citizen backlash scuttled the deal.

"I think people will describe Lionel's mayoralty as a transition period," said former City Manager Henry Gardner. "It was a transition as far as what was happening in the political culture. But Lionel was hardly a transition mayor. He was very clear about what his agenda was. He had very strong feelings about the importance of opening City Hall to minorities and women, and all minorities, not just African Americans."

Wilson was a centrist who brought to politics the old-fashioned values bred into him from his West Oakland childhood. He got along with the local kids who had become radicalized and formed the Black Panther Party. As the head of a local anti-poverty program in the 1960s, he helped future party co-founder Bobby Seale get a job at the agency.

And he mixed equally well with business leaders who represented the old guard. Wilson was as concerned with the city's deteriorating economy as with civil rights and affirmative action.

An estimated $1 billion worth of construction came during his term, and another $1 billion was planned. Landmarks of the Wilson era include the City Center complex, a downtown hotel and convention center and new federal and state office buildings.

Praise From Friends, Foes

"He was certainly a great leader for Oakland," said Councilman Dick Spees, a conservative by Oakland standards who was often at odds with Wilson. "He was a person who was very progressive in his politics and his personal belief

system, but at the same time he was moderate and even conservative in regard to finances."

Wilson pushed his policies through despite operating under Oakland's "weak mayor" form of government, in which the mayor is but one vote on the nine-member City Council. His job was to line up a five-vote majority, and colleagues said he never gaveled open a public meeting without knowing the score beforehand.

"That's why he'd sit there like a judge," said West Oakland activist Paul Cobb. "He didn't worry. There were no surprises on the floor."

Former Councilwoman Mary Moore, who was first elected on Wilson's slate in 1977, said Wilson could be jealous of competitors or bored with the details of the job, but his brains and compassion shone through.

Reaching Out to Grass Roots

"All the people who came from that generation had to be super people to start with," she said. "Basically, he had real strong, clear values. . . . I would say they were old-fashioned liberal values. He had a tremendous feeling for ordinary people."

Toni Adams, a former Wilson staffer, told of the day a felon whom Wilson had sent to prison as a judge came to visit him.

"He just came in to say how important he (Wilson) was in his life, even though he had thrown him in jail," Adams said. "He said (Wilson) talked to him like a man and helped him understand what was happening."

Wilson loved such encounters and remained in Oakland despite opportunities to make a name for himself elsewhere. He turned down a chance to be appointed to the state Supreme Court before running for mayor, a part-time job that paid $15,000.

In a statement yesterday, former Black Panther leaders David Hilliard and Elaine Brown remembered their old ally with affection.

"Lionel Wilson's bailiff asked him one day in that last year he was on the Alameda County Superior Court bench where he had gotten the cigars. 'Huey Newton sent them to me from Cuba,' he told us was his reply. We all howled many times over the plain truth. . . . This was Lionel Wilson. He was everything he said he was, even if he didn't seem to be. He believed in truth, and in love, and in freedom."

Struggle With Failing Health

Friends said Wilson was proud of his athleticism and became upset in recent years when his body began to fail. They were disturbed, but not surprised, that the man who had given his life to public service elected to end it privately, with only his wife, Dorothy, sharing the experience.

"They wanted some peaceful time together," said Bill Patterson, one of Wilson's closest friends. "His life had always been public. Dorothy paid the price for that, because he was always out there in the community he loved."

In addition to his wife, Wilson is survived by three sons, Lionel B. Wilson and Steven Wilson of Oakland and Robin Wilson of Sacramento; brothers Harold, Kermit and Warren Wilson, all of Oakland, and Julius Wilson of Castro Valley; and a sister, Marie Anderson of San Leandro.

Funeral arrangements have not been set.

LIONEL WILSON'S LEGACY

■ Wilson's election in 1977 as Oakland's first African American mayor united liberals and blacks who had chafed under the city's Republican-dominated City Hall.

■ Wilson was a popular mayor during the first two of his three terms. Both supporters and adversaries credited him with increasing the participation of women and minorities in city government. With a low tax base and the limitations imposed by Proposition 13, Oakland pioneered creative financing deals to raise money, including selling and leasing back its public buildings.

■ Oakland's downtown skyline was shaped in part by Wilson's policies. He won a battle with then-San Francisco Mayor Dianne Feinstein for a huge federal complex that brought more than 4,000 government workers to Oakland. But failures and delays in numerous other downtown projects came to haunt Wilson, and by the end of his tenure in 1991 the city's main street, Broadway, was pockmarked by defunct and struggling businesses.

Wilson sworn in as new mayor

■ Wilson was a former professional baseball player and avid sports fan. He fought a long, costly and ultimately losing battle to keep the Raiders from relocating to Los Angeles, and he engineered a $15 million loan to keep the A's in town. In his third term he supported a $600 million offer to bring the Raiders back to Oakland, but dropped the effort amid a popular revolt.

■ When crack cocaine and associated violence swept the city in the late 1980s, critics grumbled that Wilson had lost touch. At one memorable incident in 1987, a crowd of 2,000 people jeered the absent mayor in a meeting called by the powerful Oakland Community Organizations.

■ Oakland's mayor is now a full-time, $80,000-a-year job thanks to a ballot measure Wilson offered up in 1988. When he took office, it was a part-time post that paid $15,000.

San Francisco Examiner

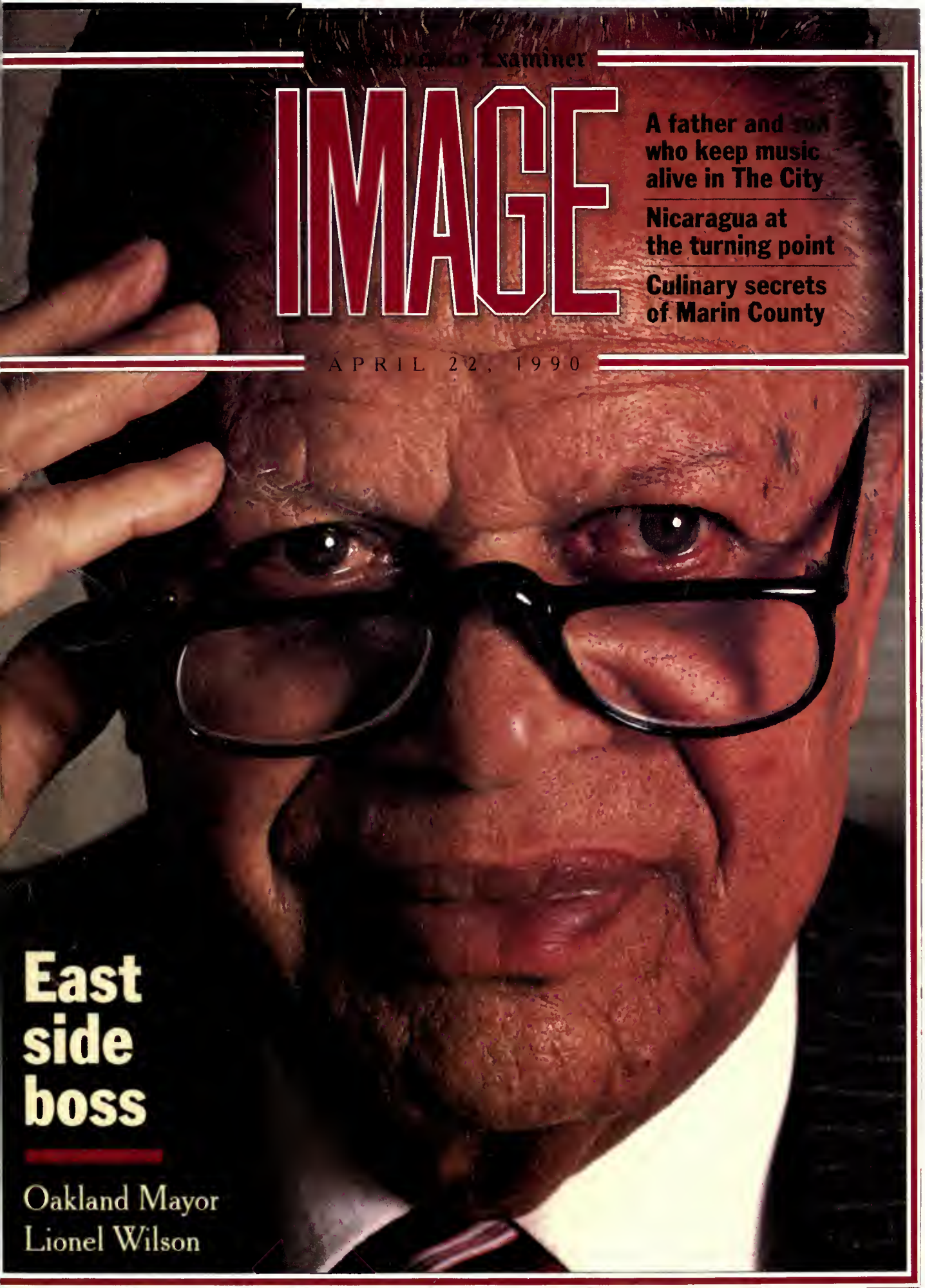
IMAGE

A father and [illegible] who keep music alive in The City

Nicaragua at the turning point

Culinary secrets of Marin County

APRIL 22, 1990



East side boss

Oakland Mayor Lionel Wilson

Cataloging Information

Lionel Wilson (b. 1915) Attorney, mayor

Attorney, Judge, and Oakland Mayor, 1992, viii, 104 pp.

Education at UC Berkeley, 1932-1938 and Hastings College of the Law, 1946-1949; US Army service, 1942-1945; NAACP and other civic leadership positions; Oakland Economic Development Commission and Corporation; Alameda County municipal and superior court judgeships; election campaigns, 1945-1988; service as mayor of Oakland, California, 1977-1990, including reference to Port of Oakland, Raiders football team and other urban issues.

Introduction by Edward J. Blakely, Department of City and Regional Planning, UC Berkeley.

Interviewed 1985 and 1990 by Gabrielle Morris for the University of California Black Alumni Project. The Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

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PREFACE

In America education has long been an important avenue of opportunity. From our earliest years young people and their families have looked to the nation's colleges and universities to provide the knowledge and experience that will enable the new generation to take its place in the world of work and government and creative activity. In turn, one measure of the quality of American universities and colleges is the breadth and diversity of their students, including how well they reflect the mix of social, racial, and economic backgrounds that make up the communities from which they come and in which they will take part as graduates.

On the West Coast, the University of California at Berkeley has from its beginnings in the 1860s welcomed the sons and daughters of small farmers and shopkeepers, railroad workers and laborers, as well as the children of lawyers and doctors, corporate executives, from many ethnic and racial groups. About 1915, as far as we know, the first black students enrolled at Berkeley, pioneers of yet another group of Americans eager to seek the best in higher education and to broaden their participation in the life of California and the nation.

Those first black students to come to Cal were indeed on their own, with few fellow black students and no special programs or black faculty to guide them or serve as role models. During the Great Depression of the 1930s a few more came, maybe a hundred at a time in all. The education benefits of the G.I. Bill for men and women who did military service during World War II opened the doors to many more black students to attend Cal in the late 1940s and early 1950s. A census taken in 1966 counted 226 black students, 1.02 percent of all the students at Berkeley. By the fall of 1988, there were 1,944 black graduate and undergraduate students, 6.1 percent of the student body. With changing population and immigration patters in recent years, as well as active campus recruiting programs, for the first time there is not a single majority ethnic group in the entire undergraduate student body at Berkeley.

Looking back from the 1990s, those early trailblazers are very special. Though few in number, a large percentage of them have gone on to distinguished careers. They have made significant contributions in economics, education, medicine, government, community service, and other

fields. It is fitting that a record of their initiative and energy be preserved in their own accounts of their expectations of the University of California, their experiences as students there, and how these experiences shaped their later lives. Their stories are a rich part of the history of the University.

Since 1970, the University has sought to gather information on this remarkable group of students, as noted in the following list of oral histories. In 1983, the UC Black Alumni Club and University officials began planning an organized project to document the lives and accomplishments of its black graduates. In order to provide scholars access to the widest possible array of data the present series includes oral histories conducted for Regional Oral History Office projects on California Government History Documentation and the History of Bay Area Philanthropy, funded by various donors.

With the advice and assistance of the Black Alumni Club, and the support of other alumni and friends of the University, the Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library is tape-recording and publishing interviews with representative black alumni who attended Cal between the years 1920 and 1956. As a group, these oral histories contain research data not previously available about black pioneers in higher education. As individuals, their stories offer inspiration to young people who may now be thinking of entering the University.

The Regional Oral History Office was established in 1952 to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons significant in the history of California and the West. The Office is under the administrative direction of The Bancroft Library and Willa Baum, Division Head. Copies of all interviews in the series are available for research use in The Bancroft Library and UCLA Department of Special Collections. Selected interviews are also available at other manuscripts depositories.

Gabrielle Morris, Director
University of California Black Alumni Project

Willa K. Baum, Division Head
Regional Oral History Office

October 1991
Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library
University of California, Berkeley

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA BLACK ALUMNI SERIES

Interviews completed or in process as of September 1991

Allen Broussard, On the California Courts, in process.

Walter Gordon, Athlete, Officer in Law Enforcement and Administration, Governor of the Virgin Islands, 1980.*

Ida Jackson, Overcoming Barriers in Education, 1990.

John Miller, "Issues of Criminal Justice and Black Politics in California," in Legislative Issue Management and Advocacy, 1961-1974, 1983.*

Charles Patterson, On Oakland Economic Development and Philanthropy, in process.*

Tarea Hall Pittman, NAACP Official and Civil Rights Worker, 1974.*

Marvin Poston, Making Opportunities in Vision Care, 1989.

Emmett J. Rice, Education of an Economist: From Fulbright Scholar to the Federal Reserve Board, 1951-1979, 1991.

William Byron Rumford, Legislator for Fair Employment, Fair Housing, and Public Health, 1973.*

Lionel Wilson, Attorney, Judge, and Oakland Mayor, 1992.

*Interviews conducted for other Regional Oral History Office projects, funded by various donors.

INTRODUCTION--by Professor Edward J. Blakely

Who is the hero of our time? If there is a hero of our time, he or she would have to come from Oakland. Nowhere in America has a city presented so many options, opportunities, and challenges as this city on San Francisco Bay. One person in our time--Lionel Wilson--personifies all of the city's glory and its pain.

Lionel is a true son of Oakland. As in so many cases, his character was molded on the playing fields of Oakland. Those playing fields presented him with the most fundamental challenges for using all of his abilities to work effectively with others to forge victory. Oakland's playing fields taught him that it was not color nor family wealth but character that shaped opportunity. This view from Oakland shaped his view of the world.

I have known and seen Oakland through the eyes of Oakland's hero, Lionel Wilson, for over a quarter of a century. I have known him as a friend and colleague, working on linking the University of California at Berkeley to the Oakland community. When I was a student at Berkeley in the early sixties, Lionel Wilson inspired me to devote my time and energies to working with him on youth and community issues in Oakland. He recognized the enormous power of the university as a force for positive change. It had changed his life chances and he felt it could change those of others. We worked together on how to make the entire institution feel this responsibility.

Over the years, we kept working on this same problem from different perspectives. After Lionel Wilson's inauguration as mayor in 1977, one of his first acts was to call upon me to develop a formal program that linked the university and the city. We worked together for twelve years hammering out one of the most successful partnerships in the nation between a major research university and a city. This partnership is a symbol of Lionel's vision. It is this vision and determination that makes the stuff of heroes. He has become more heroic throughout our long friendship. His heroism emerged from the fate of the community.

As Oakland grew in the postwar era, Lionel Wilson served it as a young student leader and later attorney. As the community became engulfed in social strife, he was there to calm the antagonists and win the hearts of the most disenfranchised groups with his persistence in their behalf. As the community matured and needed leadership, he was

there to serve as a superior court judge. When Oakland needed someone to forge a new coalition against the ravages of poverty, he was there to lead the effort. As the community made its transition from leadership of the elite to leadership based in the community, he was asked to serve as mayor. He brought world leaders to share in Oakland's renaissance and brought the University of California's headquarters back to its historic venue on Lake Merritt.

In essence, Lionel Wilson has made the community of Oakland live up to its promise to him and, thereby, to all of its citizens. He has made Oakland the center of his life and, in doing so, he has pushed and pulled many lives to give more to their community than they could have ever anticipated. He has done this by his example, his leadership, and his attention to people. His view of the world starts with how he can serve, not what he can get. These are the qualities of a hero. Certainly, Lionel Wilson is Oakland's hero, if not the hero for all of us in these times.

Edward J. Blakely

September 1991
Berkeley, California

Edward J. Blakely is professor of City and Regional Planning at the University of California. He is the executive director of the University-Oakland Metropolitan Forum, a partnership between the University of California at Berkeley, Mills College, Holy Names College, Hayward State University, and the Peralta Community Colleges. He received his master's degree in history at Berkeley in 1963 and his doctorate from UCLA. He received the San Francisco Foundation Award in 1990 for his services to the Bay Area. He has been a friend and advisor to Lionel Wilson since 1962.

INTERVIEW HISTORY

Lionel Wilson is one of those whom The Bancroft Library most wished to interview for its project on the accomplishments of early African-American alumni of the university, A 1939 graduate of the Berkeley campus and 1949 graduate of Hastings College of Law, Lionel Wilson went on to become, in 1960, one of the first persons of his race to be appointed to the bench in California and, in 1977, the first minority mayor of Oakland, a city of 385,000.

Five interviews were recorded between January 1985 and August 1990. The first was conducted in the formal, dark-panelled mayor's office in the neoclassical 1920s Oakland City Hall, and the later ones in streamlined contemporary quarters across the street where city administrative offices were moved when City Hall was declared unsafe--symbolic of the condition of much municipal infrastructure of the period. The sessions were sandwiched in among the mayor's numerous managerial and political responsibilities, with a hiatus in 1986-1987 while Wilson recovered from a spell of heart trouble.

Although brief, Mayor Wilson's comments provide insight on a dramatic period in the history of Oakland and illuminate the problems and promise of the complex urban issues of the 1960s-1980s. Wilson's narrative recalls his experience at the heart of self-help efforts that created a sizable and viable black political structure in the East Bay, resulting in a shift of the city's leadership from primarily downtown business executives to community-based multicultural spokespersons. Interestingly, he mentions several traditional corporate figures as taking the lead in broadening representation in city decisionmaking.

The success of the movement is reflected in his comments on being a pioneer on the Alameda County courts, appointment to increasingly important civic committees, and leadership of a vigorous and controversial local antipoverty program. A possible clue to Wilson's style can be found in recurring references throughout the interview to his love of sports. As Professor Edward Blakely notes in his introduction to the oral history, the mayor has been active in competitive sports since schooldays. In 1991, Wilson is reported to continue to challenge all comers on the tennis court. Wilson is of medium build and speaks softly but, as he speaks of his long defense of Oakland as home base for the Raiders football team, one senses that he is a tough competitor who does not give up easily.

Thanks are due to Oakland Tribune librarian Yae Shinomiya for her friendly efficiency in providing access to the paper's clip files on Mayor Wilson, which were invaluable in preparing for the interviews. The interview tapes were transcribed and lightly edited in the Regional Oral History Office and sent to Judge Wilson for review in April 1991, after his retirement as mayor. He read it over carefully and corrected names and dates as required.

Gabrielle Morris
Interviewer-Editor
Regional Oral History Office

March 1992
Regional Oral History Office
University of California, Berkeley

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY--Lionel Wilson

1915	Born in New Orleans, Louisiana, to Jules and Louise Wilson
1918	Wilson family moved to Oakland
1932	Graduated from McClymonds High School with honors, worked as a newspaper boy
1939	B.A., economics, University of California, Berkeley; student employment as a porter, dishwasher, and sugar factory laborer; played semi-professional baseball and basketball
1940-1942	Maintenance worker at Alameda Naval Air Station; recreation staff, North Oakland YMCA
1943-1946	First sergeant, U.S. Army in Europe
1946-1949	University of California, Hastings College of Law
1950	Began law practice with George Vaughns in Oakland; president, Berkeley NAACP; board member, South Berkeley YMCA
1953	Ran for Berkeley City Council with Ura Harvey, candidate for Berkeley school board
1955	Ran for Berkeley City Council, with Vivian O. Marsh, planning commissioner and past president State Association of Colored Women
1959	Metoyer, Wilson, and Wilmont Sweeney form new law firm; elected president revived East Bay Democratic Club; secretary, Berkeley-Albany Bar Association
1960	Appointed to Oakland Municipal Court by Governor Edmund G. Brown, Sr.; named vice chairman of [Oakland] Public Advisory Committee on Education
1964	Appointed to Alameda County Superior Court by Governor Brown; named to Oakland Museum board; opposed citywide school boycott
1965	Elected chairman of Oakland Economic Development Council, which administered local anti-poverty program funded by federal government; held first public forums of neighborhood advisory councils
1967	Recommended for new federal judgeship is San Jose; reorganized OECD independent of city government after repeated controversies with mayor, regional, and federal Office of Economic Opportunity, and others
1977	Elected mayor of Oakland; retired January 4, 1991

I YOUTH AND EDUCATION

[Interview 1: 22 January 1985]##[1]

Boyhood in Oakland

Morris: What I'd like to do is start at the beginning. I'll ask you a little bit about growing up in Oakland, how your family came to move here, and what it was like to be a youngster in the black community in the twenties.

Wilson: It was a lot different community then. The black community was so much smaller. I was just under four when we moved to Oakland, and I don't think there were ten thousand blacks in the East Bay at that time. It was a pretty small community.

Morris: Would that be San Francisco too?

Wilson: I would think so, yes. I said East Bay, but probably in the whole Bay Area there weren't many more than that at that time.

Morris: How did you come to leave New Orleans?

Wilson: My mother [Louise Wilson] had a brother named Ponce Barrios living in Oakland, who had come out to work in the shipyards in World War I. So then he talked to my mother and father [Jules Wilson] and convinced them that this was a better place to raise their children, that they would have better opportunities here. Then he sent for them to come out. At that time there were three of us; two younger brothers besides myself, who were born in New Orleans also.

Morris: They must have been tiny if you weren't quite four.

Wilson: I wasn't quite four, that's right.

Morris: So you don't remember New Orleans at all, or did you go back?

Wilson: I remembered very little about New Orleans, yes. My mother used to say I used to go to the stores at that age, but I remembered

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[1]This symbol (##) indicates that a tape or a segment of a tape has begun or ended. For a guide to the tapes see page 71.

very little about New Orleans until I went back. I didn't return to New Orleans other than during World War II, sitting on the outskirts of the city on a troop train for a couple of hours, and not even able to get off of it.

Until, I guess it was around 1973, I was invited to address the National Association of Court Administrators, which was meeting in New Orleans. That was my first trip back. Since then I've made many trips back there. When the present mayor of New Orleans was running for election, he was calling, calling, calling, asking me to come back to do a little campaigning for him.

I just didn't see where I could be of much help to him, and then Judge [Allen E.] Broussard got into the act, and he began to call me. He was from Louisiana, not from New Orleans, but near there somewhere down there, and was a former law partner of mine.

Then I thought about it, and Dutch Morial is a very talented, very bright man, and I said, "If Dutch thinks I could help, maybe I can." So I went down for about three days. I guess it worked out pretty well for him, because he had arranged a press conference for me when I arrived; within an hour after I arrived a press conference, and each of the major newspapers turned out, and they had front page stories.

Either that night or the next night he put on a gala around me, and it was kind of, you know, "the return of the prodigal" sort of thing. [laughs] In any event, then of course he was elected, and I went back for his swearing-in. Since then, I've been back a number of times.

Morris: Did your uncle find a place for you to live and stay in close contact with you?

Wilson: Yes, he did. Matter of fact, I guess we moved in with him for--he didn't have any children, he and his wife. I think we moved into the same house. As I remember, it was one of these big old two-story Victorians. It was on the corner of 28th and Myrtle Street, where McClymonds High School is now.

We moved in there. We lived there not too long, and then moved over to a house on 30th, between Chestnut and Linden, where we rented for a couple of years. My father bought a little house around the corner from us on Chestnut between 32nd and 30th, which was just around the corner.

My father was from the old school in the South. He started out as a carpenter's apprentice, and then later shifted into

plastering, and he was a plasterer then. But he could do carpentering, and a little of this, and a little of that in the way of building, so he bought this house, and then just did it all over himself.

Morris: That's marvelous to have those kinds of skills.

Wilson: Yes, yes.

Morris: So you stayed close with your uncle, and were there other family members?

Wilson: It was just my uncle and his wife. Ponce Barrios and his wife were the only other family members here, and then the other five children were born in that house, I guess.

Morris: I see. So he was your mother's younger brother.

Wilson: My mother's brother. She had one brother.

Morris: And, as the elder son, were you the one that helped the younger brothers get along in school?

Wilson: I guess we were pretty much on our own, each one of us. Even from a little bit of a fellow, I was always wrapped up in sports, so when I wasn't in school I was on some kind of a playground or in some kind of a recreational facility. I guess when I was ten I had a paper route, but I whipped through that paper route to get back to the playground; or to the recreation center.

Morris: Did they have playground directors, and people like that?

Wilson: They had playground directors, yes. I went to Clawson School, which is on Poplar and 32nd--it's closed now; at that time it went from the kindergarten through the ninth grade. McClymonds High School is now where it was, which was just about two and a half blocks from where we lived.

During the summer, McClymonds opened the grounds as a playground. The coach, who later became the principal, Doc Hess--he just died about a month ago--he worked on the playground during the summer as a recreation director. He lived a couple of blocks from the school, too.

Morris: Was he a good coach?

Wilson: Oh, he was a great leader, he was a tremendous leader of children and young people. Little bit of a man, about five feet four at the most, but he was a strong character, and dynamic, and strong

disciplinarian, but worked well with young people. He was a fearless little fellow.

Morris: Was there a mixture of children on the playground, blacks and whites? Any Asians at that time?

Wilson: Very few blacks. A mixture of Portuguese and Italians and Irish. Very, very few blacks. At that time--well, even by the time I reached high school, oh, maybe, 10, 15 percent of the school by then was made of black students. No more than that.

Morris: Were they mostly people like yourself who had grown up here as little kids?

Wilson: Yes.

Morris: So, did it mean that the teams were integrated, or was there any--

Wilson: The teams were integrated, yes. The athletic teams were integrated.

Morris: I came across a reference by D.G. Gibson to you as a newspaper boy. Did you know him that long ago?

Wilson: Oh, yes, yes. My first contact with D.G. Gibson was when, at the age of about twelve, I began to work in my uncle's barber shop after school, and on Saturdays, all day Saturday. He had a barber shop on 8th Street, between Broadway and Washington Street.

Morris: This is Ponce Barrios still?

Wilson: Ponce Barrios, yes, same one. He had a large barber shop, and I went to work in the barber shop shining shoes and keeping it clean. I did that through high school; junior high school and high school.

Morris: Was this where Mr. Gibson would come for--

Wilson: He was a customer. Then, also, D.G. Gibson was a distributor of cosmetics, and also a distributor of black newspapers from the East, in particular the Pittsburgh Courier, as I remember, and the Chicago Defender. My uncle would buy the papers from him and then give them to me, and let me take them out and sell them. So I developed a little following of a number of people--

On Sunday morning, I would take the papers around to Oakland, and out to Berkeley. I remember walking out there to take these papers.

Morris: That's quite a large territory to cover.

Wilson: Yes. [chuckles]

Morris: Did you read the papers? Or were you more interested in making the money?

Wilson: I was more interested in making the money out of the papers. I wasn't too interested in the papers at that time. I did read them casually.

Morris: Was Mr. Gibson already involved in political activities?

Wilson: Yes, he was already active. I believe he had come to California on the railroads. I think he had worked on the railroads when he initially came to California.

College Years

Morris: Was he one of the people that encouraged you to go to college? Was your family pushing you, your teachers?

Wilson: It was mainly, I guess, my uncle. My uncle was a strong believer in education. My father was like many of the Creoles out of Louisiana who felt that high school education was enough, and it was time to go to work. But my uncle believed strongly in it, and my mother did. They were the strong motivators that encouraged us to prepare to go to college and to go on to college.

Morris: Did you think about any place but the university at Berkeley?

Wilson: Oh, it was made clear to us that either we made the grades to get into UC Berkeley, or we weren't going to college. [laughs]

Morris: How did you feel about that? Were your friends, and the people you played basketball and baseball with--

Wilson: Most of them were not--no, they didn't have people motivating them, and I don't remember anyone in my class going directly into Cal but me. Some of them went to San Francisco State, and the state colleges, but I don't remember another one of my class that went directly into Cal.

Most of them didn't have that kind of drive and motivation, except there was a small group of friends, and we formed a little social club. Some of them, their parents were pushing them, but it was just a handful.

Morris: Was this a church-connected social group?

Wilson: No, it wasn't, it was just that our families had become friends in one way or another--some of them, in any event. We'd gotten to know each other through different social contacts.

Morris: Were these primarily other people who'd come from Louisiana, Creole background?

Wilson: No, they weren't. There were one or two who were, but not primarily.

Morris: Have you stayed in touch with them? Are some of these the people you went to school with?

Wilson: Some of them. Not many. Most of us were from poorer families. There was one whose father was a retired major from the army, and who'd done well; he'd served a number of years, he had organized the Phillipine Constabulary Band in World War I at the insistence of the president; Quezon, then I believe, was the president in the Phillipines, and Major Loving had organized the Phillipine Constabulary Band, and had built an estate over there, and had property over there, and a home, and whatnot.

He had one child, a son, who was a little younger than me, but he was part of our group, who ultimately went into the service himself and became a colonel, retired, and lives in Davis. I see him once in a while.

They were not from New Orleans, or Louisiana, but then there was another one, the Smith family, and my parents had known the Smiths in New Orleans. They were from New Orleans. There were three sons, the oldest one and I were about the same age, a couple of months apart.

He ultimately became a pharmacist, worked in Rumford's Pharmacy for a number of years in Berkeley.

Discrimination: Passing for White

Morris: I think of Louisiana as being the deep South, and that being where life was most difficult for blacks. Was it different in Louisiana, or was discrimination one of the reasons your family--

Wilson: It was the deep South, and yes, it was. Yes, it was, and, of course, the schools were all segregated in Louisiana. However, in some fields, in the building trades, for instance, it wasn't

unionized, so--I don't know, you went through stages. You were "colored" when I was a kid coming up, and then you became "Negroes," and then "blacks" down the line.

But while there was far more discrimination and far more segregation in the South than here, there was an awful lot of it here. And even as late as the early forties, there was an awful lot of discrimination here. I remember when I got out of law school--I didn't go into law school until after I came out of the service in World War II. I graduated from Cal before I went into the service.

I guess I'd only been practicing law about two years, the early fifties, I remember being in this [mayor's] office with Byron Rumford, and there was someone else with us, arguing with the mayor, the city manager, and the fire chief, over the segregated fire department. There was one firehouse right across the street from this Clawson School, where I went to school. It was the only firehouse where Negroes could serve, which meant that whatever the number of firemen that it took to serve that one house, that was the maximum number of Negroes who could work in the Oakland Fire Department.

Morris: And that was primarily in a neighborhood which by then was mostly Negro families?

Wilson: Well, there were a number, yes. And you couldn't swim in any of the swimming pools, public or private, so we swam in the estuary. There were many places that wouldn't serve you here.

Morris: Really.

Wilson: That's right. '40, '41, '42, there was one Negro teacher in the whole of the East Bay.

Morris: And it took a long time.

Wilson: Ida Jackson, she's alive now, as far as I know.

Morris: Yes, I've talked to her for this project.[2]

Wilson: One teacher. There was one Negro teacher in the whole of the West Bay, Josephine Foreman, who taught in the parochial schools in San Francisco. There were no Negro teachers in the public schools of San Francisco.

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[2]See Ida L. Jackson, Overcoming Barriers in Education, recorded in 1984, Regional Oral History Office, University of California, Berkeley.

Now, when I say there was one here, and there was one there, there may have been people who were passing for white, because as a result of the discrimination, you found many people who were fair-complected and passed for white to get jobs of one kind or another.

Morris: They continued the rest of their lives as white, or did some people move back and forth as the circumstances--

Wilson: Some of them moved back and forth, and some if them didn't. Some of them just lived out their lives as white. And, of course, there were some tragedies. I know a family who were originally out of Louisiana; they were already here when we arrived in Oakland, had been here a couple, two or three years.

One of them, the daughter--there were three children; the daughter was the youngest, and two sons. She's married to a man now, he's way up in age and he's crippled, and he's been crippled for some time. But he had lived as white, and had two children, and then somehow or other, his children were ten and twelve, something like that, and his wife found out, and then immediately broke and dissolved the marriage.

Morris: That's a pity. That really is.

Wilson: You're right. In terms of employment, opportunities were few and far between, except in some phases of the building trades; plastering was one of them. A few carpenters. Many of the other building trades, such as electrical and plumbing, had little or no opportunities for Negroes.

But in terms of working, I remember in the WPA days, I graduated, and I was working on EEP, Emergency Education Program, which was a professional project. I was at the North Oakland YMCA, which catered to Negroes primarily, and it was in a house, just in a big two-story house. They used to have classes preparing people to take civil-service exams.

The post office exam I took myself, and the first time I think I was fifty-two on the list or something like that. The way I found that they had passed me up was when I ran into someone who was lower on the list--120, 150, or two hundred--who had been working for about six months. And that was the way I learned that they had passed me up on the list.

Then one of my brothers--he's now a dentist--he had taken it, and he was 120 on the list. At that time the federal government didn't ask for race, but they asked for a picture. I was the

darkest in the family. Well, when they looked at my brother, they thought he was white, so they offered him the job when they got down to him.

Then I took it again, and this time I was fifth out of thirty-five hundred, I just had a couple of people ahead of me who had veterans' preference. I was called in for an interview, if you want to call it that, this time. But it didn't really amount to anything other than to be told by the assistant superintendent of mails that, "The fact that you're called doesn't mean that you are going to get the job," as I well knew. And I didn't.

The probation department here, which, at that time, had no Negroes in it--I took that exam, and in that exam you were not called for an oral unless you passed the written. So when I was called in for the oral it meant that I'd passed the written, and about the only question they asked me was, "You're Lionel Wilson, you graduated from the University of California, Berkeley?" "Yes, that's right." "Why'd you take the exam?" I told them. They said, "Fine. You'll hear from us in a couple of weeks." Well, I did, that I'd failed to pass the examination.

Morris: Oh, dear.

Wilson: So. [laughs]

University of California, Berkeley, 1932-1939, Sports and Studies

Morris: How about Cal itself? When did you enter as a freshman, about 1933, '34?

Wilson: Yes, 1932. At Cal itself, there was a great deal of discrimination also, and then some of the professional schools you simply couldn't get into unless, as in the case of Marvin Poston, who became an optometrist, who was able to get in through someone who his family, his mother or someone, got to know, who had some influence.

Morris: I think it was persistence, too.

Wilson: Yes.

Morris: Because when I talked with him, his recollection is that there was a faculty member who was determined that there not be a black graduate of the ophthalmology department.

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Wilson: --he [Nibs Price] was one of the prime reasons Negroes couldn't play basketball in the Pacific Coast Conference. I think it was broken open in the Northern Division first, and then in the Southern, even though--and here again, I remember a fellow came up to Cal--I don't remember if I had graduated or was a senior when he came to Cal from Los Angeles--who did play for Nibs Price, played basketball, but Nibs didn't know he was black.

He was blond, blue-eyed. I knew him from Los Angeles, because I had dated his older sister in Los Angeles. They lived in Los Angeles. I think, finally, before Nibs retired, I think there was a known black he permitted to play, but that was under the influence of the football coach at the time, who was very fond of this fellow, and he played on the football team. And they prevailed upon Nibs Price to let him play on the basketball team. That was Tom Tryon, who was in the Oakland school department. He was already on the football team.

Morris: Wasn't Walter Gordon already a coach?

Wilson: Football.

Morris: He played football?

Wilson: He may have done some coaching, but not basketball. He played football. There had been a few who played football. Walter Gordon had played football, and I remember someone named Francis, Smoke Francis, who had played football. There was one here and there.

Morris: But a big, husky, young black student who wanted to play football couldn't just go out and sign up?

Wilson: Oh, no. Well, if you played football, some of them could play on the football teams. Because I remember a very close friend of mine who was a couple of years behind me, two or three years behind me, but who was a great athlete, truly a great athlete.

If he'd come along later, he'd have been a star major league baseball player. He could play anything, and was outstanding. Clint Evans was the baseball coach, and Clint wanted him on the baseball team, and they wanted him on the football team. But they had told him that if he came to Cal, he couldn't play basketball,

and there wasn't anyone on the basketball team who could carry his shoes, in terms of being as good--

Morris: Athletic ability.

Wilson: Athletic ability as a basketball player. But he had been told that he couldn't play because Nibs Price wouldn't allow him to play on the basketball team.

Morris: Were there enough black students around to question that and to take--

Wilson: No. There weren't more than a handful. There were several women when I enrolled at Cal, several women, and maybe a handful of men.

Morris: Did you get a recommendation from one of the counselors in the high school, or did you just fill out the application and send it in, for enrolling at Cal?

Wilson: I just filled in the application and sent it in.

Morris: And how come you decided on economics?

Wilson: I started out--as a matter of fact, when I was in my last year in high school, my family suddenly wondered what I was going to do next. I'd just change the subject. So they cornered me one day and said, "What are you going to do after graduation?" I said, "I'm going to study law. I'm going to be a lawyer."

By then the Depression had set in, and they looked around and said, "If all you're going to be is another starving lawyer, boy, you had better go to work." Well, that was a fiction, because there weren't any jobs, anyway.

Morris: Lawyers or anything else, yes.

Wilson: So I said, "Wait a minute, I'm going to college." They said, well, what am I going to study? They decided I was going to be a dentist, so I entered in pre-dental, and I never would have made a dentist. I never liked to work with my hands unless it was a baseball bat, [Morris laughs] or a tennis racquet, or a football, or a basketball. But I never liked working with my hands. First, I never liked the sciences, the life sciences.

It took about a year and a half before I realized that my family didn't know what I was doing there, and so I changed my major, but I didn't have the nerve to change it to pre-law, Those were the days when you obeyed your parents more, so I thought about math, which I did well in, and languages, and I decided I'd go into languages.

So I switched over to a major in Spanish, and a minor in French until--

Morris: Good for you.

Wilson: After the first semester of my junior year, and then all of a sudden I asked myself, "What am I going to do with this? You can't teach."

Morris: Did you have any thought of maybe going into business in South America, or Central America?

Wilson: No, I didn't, I thought about it, and I thought about interpreting or something like that. Then I realized it wasn't realistic, so at that point I switched over to economics, with a minor in political science, and that's how I graduated.

Morris: In view of your later life, it sounds like you ended up in the right place.

Wilson: Yes.

Morris: Were there some faculty members that you particularly liked or that were particularly helpful?

Wilson: By the time I graduated, yes. There was one particular, Doctor Gulick, Charles Gulick. Then I also took a graduate course in agricultural labor from Paul Taylor.

Morris: Was he already studying problems of migrant labor?

Wilson: Yes, he was. Yes, he was.

Morris: Did that make a real impression on you?

Wilson: I don't recall particularly that it did. But I do remember taking a graduate course in personnel administration with Dr. Gulick, and he was an up-front person. And he called me aside, he told me, he said, "Look, I can place everybody in this seminar, but I won't be able to place you." Because, you know.

Morris: Oh dear, yes.

Wilson: I appreciated his forthrightness, and I was satisfied it wasn't something he wanted. I think he was very fair with me, I felt.

Morris: Were you at that point enrolled as a graduate student, or were you able to take graduate courses?

Wilson: Yes, yes. I had graduated.

Morris: And then you continued to take courses.

Wilson: Yes, correct.

Morris: Let's see, that was 1937, the war hadn't yet appeared--

Wilson: No, I stayed out of school, you see. What happened is, when I thought I was going to be graduating, and about a month before graduating, I was notified that I was short three units in my major. Because I'd made the change, you see, and I was late.

So I was told that I could file a special petition to graduate, and I did, and then about a week before graduation I received a negative response, that I couldn't graduate without those three units. So I was pretty disgusted, and I dropped out of school, and I stayed out a year and a half.

Morris: I can see why.

Wilson: And then came back. My family didn't think I'd ever go back, but after a year and a half, I went back, and graduated. It wound up I only needed one semester to pick up three units, and I took some other courses. And it was in '38, December '38, that I finished up and was in the graduating class of '39, then.

Brothers and World War II

Morris: Your younger brothers, by then, were they at the university, too?

Wilson: My brother Kermit was at the university. It was when he arrived at the university, that's when I got the nerve to switch.

Morris: He's the one that went into dentistry?

Wilson: Yes, that's right. And it was good, because he had always liked to work with his hands, and had been good working with his hands. So it was natural for him, as it turned out.

Morris: And it was good for your parents, too. They got their ambition fulfilled. [Wilson chuckles] One of the boys went into dentistry.

Wilson: Yes.

Morris: I was wondering if having a brother who was still at Cal, maybe helped you make up your mind to go back and finish up?

Wilson: That might have been. Then I had another brother, Barry--I guess, yes, he was at Cal by the time I graduated. Because I took a semester of graduate work, and then I stayed out another semester, and then I went back. Because I remember I took an upper division course with him.

Morris: With your brother.

Wilson: The younger brother, not the one in pre-dental, but a younger brother who is the only one in the eight of them in the family who is not alive. I was the oldest of eight children, six boys and two girls. He was the navigator on a B-17 lost in World War II, over Europe. But therein lies a story also, because there were no Negro navigators in World War II, but when he decided that he wanted to fly--at first he didn't, because my mother didn't want him to.

He had become interested in flying on a Thanksgiving day; a fellow was at our home who was my doubles partner in tennis at the time, and was one of the first blacks into the civil aeronautics program that they had.

Morris: At Cal?

Wilson: No.

Morris: In the Civil Aeronautics Corps.

Wilson: Yes, it was Civil Aeronautics Administration, or something. So he said, "Let's go out to the airport, and I'll take you up." We got out there, and it was too windy, they were flying Piper Cubs, the students, and we couldn't go up. But from that day, Barry wanted to fly.

So when he was going to be drafted--he was going to become a dentist also. This is what he wanted, and he had graduated from Cal by then, in pre-dental, but he didn't have the money to go on. This same uncle who had helped my brother Kermit into dental school wanted to help him, that's Ponce Barrios, but Barry was

very independent, said, no, he wanted to save his own money. So he went to work as a laborer at Mare Island.

Then when he was going to be drafted, he told my mother, "Look, I'm going in the army, I'm not going to fly," and she said, "All right." So the air corps had boards which were traveling around the country and they would sit on different college campuses. He found that the board was going to be meeting at Stanford, so he applied and went up before the board.

An old air corps major, who was the chairman of the board, called him aside, and said, "Look, son, I see from your college papers you're a Negro." He said, "Forget that, you're an American." He said, "If you go in as a Negro, you're going to get inferior equipment, and inferior training, and that's a lot of nonsense anyway."

He convinced Barry, so Barry went in. They said, "You're an American," and let it go at that.

Morris: He just filled out a new set of papers?

Wilson: That's right. [Morris laughs] Barry looked very much like my father, who was very fair, and had kind of grayish blue eyes, and that's how he wound up a navigator.

Morris: Oh, my goodness. There was a black air corps unit, though.

Wilson: Oh, yes. This same fellow, my doubles partner, he was one of the original 99th Fighter Squadron. They were the first blacks admitted in the air corps. It was a segregated unit, of course, all of our forces were segregated, you see.

Ed Toppins and--

Morris: Is that your tennis partner?

Wilson: My doubles partner, Edward Toppins. So he became an original member of the 99th Fighter Squadron.

Morris: He'd already had flying experience with the CAA.

Wilson: He'd had some, yes, with the Civil Aeronautic Authority.

Morris: Boy, those were really remarkable days. You people were finding all kinds of ways of doing things you wanted to do.

Wilson: Yes, yes, yes, that's right. The brother who was a dentist went through the service, he went into the service, he just signed up.

No one said anything to him, and when he graduated from Cal dental school he was given thirty days to enlist or be drafted. Well, obviously, he enlisted, because he was commissioned.

Morris: He would go in as an officer, with his dental training.

Wilson: That's right. They sent him into training down near Bakersfield. Negro units kept going through, and he thought he was going to be assigned to one at any time, and he never was. The next thing he knew, he was shipped to England to a dental clinic for a heavy bomb group a couple of hours out of London. He finally realized that they had enrolled him as white. So he went through the war as white.

Morris: That's a hard decision, then, when it comes to going back to civilian life. What do you do?

Wilson: That's right. They drafted me, I went kicking and screaming. [laughter] I was at Monterey, and I had been there a couple of days, and I had a question on my mind about insurance. I went to the headquarters to ask about it. This corporal brought my service record out, and it was a little booklet about that size, and white.

When he brought it out and put it on the desk, and I looked at it, on the cover there was a circle about three quarters of an inch in diameter, stamped in blue, with a "w" inside of it. I waited until he had answered the question I wanted. I suspected what it was, so then I asked him. "By the way," I said, "I saw the stamp on my service record with a 'w' inside it. What does that mean?" He said, "That's nothing, you don't have to worry about that, that just means you're white."

I laughed, I said, "Somebody's made a mistake. I'm not white, I'm Negro." The poor guy was embarrassed. He scratched it out, reached under the table counter, and came up with another stamp, which had a "c" in the middle of it, for colored.

Morris: So those service records didn't carry photographs.

Wilson: No, no. I'm going to have to put this over to another time.

Morris: I understand, thank you for taking this much time.

Re-election Campaign of 1985

[Interview 2: May 6, 1985]##

Wilson: --and actually worked part time, and campaigned. I just haven't had time to campaign, very little. I've made appearances but I mean, to actually spend time and go out into the community other than formal appearances, I just haven't been able to do it, because there are so many things that keep coming up.

Also, unfortunately, so many of them I have to handle myself.

Morris: Yes, that's hard. Are there more kinds of things coming up now than usual because it's an election year?

Wilson: I don't think so. I don't think so. No, I don't think so. And of course, a part, too, is that we just started with the campaign just very recently, recent weeks, and [Oakland City Councilman] Wilson Riles [Jr.] has been campaigning for sixteen months. I have this first letter he sent out sixteen months ago; he has nothing to do but campaign because he works part time; he has a job with [Alameda County Supervisor] John George.

John has no program, because he's never been able to get any support at the board level, up until very recently. Now, with the changing make-up of the board of supervisors, he may be able to get a little more, but before that, John had nothing. So, Riles had nothing but time to--

Morris: Do the community contact thing.

Wilson: That's right. There was a flap about it, but somehow or another, John managed to get some money out to him to buy a computer. And they just crank this stuff out, and he's been out there for at least sixteen months.

And, as I just told one of my sons, who had called, he was laughing and kidding me about the campaign, and I said, "You know, if I weren't going to put on a good campaign, I wouldn't have gotten into it. You know, I would have just not run. But once I decided, and it wasn't an easy decision, but once I decided to run, then I'm going to put on a good campaign."

Morris: You've certainly had a lot of experience in Alameda County politics, to know what it takes to put on a good campaign.

Wilson: Yes, yes.

II BECOMING A LAWYER

Morris: That's where I thought we might pick up with this interview for The Bancroft Library. We got you into the army, and then I wondered at what point you decided to go to law school, and if that decision was related to an interest in political matters?

Wilson: Actually, I'd always wanted to be a lawyer, but when I started at Cal, I was just turning seventeen. Those were the days when young people more or less did what their parents wanted them, in terms of direction. When my parents--actually it was my mother most, and my uncle Ponce Barrios--but anyway, they got together, and said, "Hey, by the way, what are you going to be?" [laughs] I said, "Well, a lawyer." "A lawyer?! Another starving lawyer?" (The Depression had hit by then, and there weren't a handful of black lawyers here, and those that were here were doing nothing.)

I said, "That's all you're thinking about, that I ought to find a job." That was really--the idea of finding a job, where? There weren't any jobs, and what few jobs there were, they weren't for blacks, except maybe for waiting tables, running on the road. A handful managed to get into the post office--not even a handful--three or four who had contacts, one whose father had been a plastering contractor, and one or two others.

But there wasn't one black in Alameda County Probation, for instance. I think the city had one, a mail clerk. Even the federal government, the post office, was discriminating against blacks.

So the answer to going to work is, "Work where?" So I said, "No, I'm going to college." What am I going to be? So they decided, looked around, that there were a couple of dentists who were scratching out a fair living, and so they said that I was going to become a dentist.

Sure, if I had applied myself, I could have gone through school, but I would have been a terrible dentist and I'd have been a very unhappy dentist, and an unhappy person, because I've never liked to work with my hands.

There's even a standing joke today, about how when I was a kid I made my first canteen in the fifth grade, and it leaked, you know? [laughs] But I started out in pre-dental, and it almost meant that I got dumped out of school, because I had no interest, and I didn't go to classes, and I perfected my basketball, on a daily basis, in the gym.

Morris: Yes, I think a lot of young men feel that way.

Wilson: So then after about a year and a half, two things happened. One, I realized that my family, their education was limited, too, and they really didn't know what was going on out there, and what I was doing. Two, the brother next to me was making it into college, and he was a natural for dentistry, so I let the family know I was making a switch.

He then became the dental student in the family. It was perfect for him. Even in dental school, I remember when he got into working with gold in that stage of the training, that after doing everything he had to do, then he would sit up half the night, just working with gold, making jewelry. He loved to work with his hands, and he became a very fine dentist.

With me, where do you go from there? I still didn't have the nerve to go into pre-law against the wishes of my parents.

Morris: Did you do that after your military service?

Wilson: Yes, I went into law school after I came out of the service. But what I did was I looked around, and I always did well in math, and I did well in languages, so I switched over as a language major.

So I was a language major until I completed the first semester of my junior year, then all of a sudden it dawned on me, "How are you going to use this?"

There was nothing in education, there was no future in teaching. At that point, I thought about becoming an interpreter. When I looked into that, I found that the jobs were very limited in that field. So I changed over and I majored in economics and minored in political science, and graduated with that background.

I probably would have gone right into the law then, but by that time the war had broken out, and it was too late. I knew I was going to be drafted, I was 1-A in the draft for a long time. I was one of the few who got deferred--I was working over at the

Alameda Naval Air Station as a laborer, and I received two "Greetings."[3]

The first time I went to the draft board, I might not have gone, because the naval air station tried to keep me over there. I got to know one of the chief administrators, when I was cleaning his office in the morning, and we began to talk. I had written a couple of seminar papers in a field that he was interested in, so we got to know each other.

Then he had me pulled out of the public works department over into the aircraft repair and maintenance division. If I hadn't been in such a tough draft board, I would have been deferred, but I wasn't. But the first time, as I said, I got "Greetings," and I took them down, sang a sad song, [chuckles] and this lady, who had the reputation of being so tough, tore them up.

So then this lasted another year, and then she called me and said, "Son, I've kept you out as long as I can, you've got to go now!" I said, "Thank you, I appreciate it," and off I went in the service. That's why I didn't get into law school after I had graduated, and took some graduate work for a year.

I took one semester, and then I stayed out a semester, and had a little job, and then I went back for a semester. So it was after I came out of the service that I entered law school.

Hastings Law School, 1947-1950

Morris: Were there other people that you had been friends with growing up who were in that Hastings class with you? Were you the only black guy from Oakland?

Wilson: In that Hastings class?

Morris: Yes.

Wilson: None with whom I'd grown up. There were thirteen blacks in that class, that started out in that class. There was one, whose name was Wilson, also, whose family was also from Louisiana, and people frequently got our families mixed up. Especially when one of his

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[3]The government form letter for induction into military service during World War II began, "Greetings, you have been selected. . . ."

brothers was a dentist, and another brother was a doctor, and then my brother had become a dentist by then.

He was in that class, but he was still working in the post office. He tried to get a leave, and they turned him down, although he'd been in the post office for some time. He wasn't able to get a leave, and he just dropped out of school. But he was the only one.

There was another fellow who had moved into Oakland after the war, and had lived around the corner from me in Oakland, and that was Terry Francois, who later became one of the first black supervisors in San Francisco. Not the first black, I think there was one before him. But anyway, Terry and I became very close.

But Terry didn't start with us, he wasn't one of the thirteen. Terry was a year ahead, but then, after his first year, he went back East to get married, and the woman jilted him. He was so upset about it, he didn't return, and stayed out a year. So when I was entering the second year, he was coming back for the second year, instead of going into the third year. But he lived in Oakland and he was the only one that I knew quite well. The others were more or less strangers. Most of them had just arrived here after the war.

Morris: They were newcomers to California.

Wilson: Newcomers to California. As I say, there were thirteen. Of the thirteen, two of us graduated. Joe Kennedy, who became a superior court judge over there, and myself. Terry graduated with us, but he was not one of the original thirteen who started.

Studying and Working

Morris: Did you study together?

Wilson: We studied together, yes, we did. Terry and Joe and I studied together.

Morris: Was there anybody in particular on the faculty that you found was helpful to you?

Wilson: No.

Morris: It was sink or swim in law school?

Wilson: It was sink or swim. And my situation was a little different than even Terry or Joe. Joe's wife--he was married, had no children, and his wife worked, and Terry's wife worked. I had a non-working wife and three children to support. So I was working three part-time jobs.

At that time, Hastings was set up in a way that made it possible to work, because the classes, on a daily basis, started at eight, nine, ten, eleven. So your afternoons were all free. So I worked three part-time jobs. I worked in the YMCA in Oakland part-time, I worked for the city; a recreation director part-time. I worked as a janitor for my brother in his dental office part-time.

So there wasn't much time for--[laughs]

Morris: Boy, that must have really been tough. Where did you find time to do studying?

Wilson: Mostly at night, except that on the playground job, I had spent my life on playgrounds, and working in the Y, and worked with a lot of the younger people. So I was good with kids, I got along very well with them, and I'd study on the playground.

I remember one day, over at Hoover Junior High, I was outside, where I could see the whole playground area, and leaning up against the wall with my law book. Supervisor came along, started to give me the devil. I said, "Wait a minute," I said, "What's my purpose here? Isn't my purpose to provide program activities and keep these youngsters busy with programs?" "Yes, that's right."

"Look around you. You see any kinds standing around with nothing to do?" "No," he said. I said, "Okay, then get off my back. [laughs] Anytime you come around, you find me sitting here, and the kids are doing nothing, and I'm just sitting here studying, I think you have a basis to challenge me. But other than that--." So that ended that.

Passing the Bar Exam

Morris: How about the bar exam? That's reported to be one of the toughest parts of getting to be a lawyer.

Wilson: Less than 50 percent pass, and most of them were taking a course called--a great legal writer, probably the greatest legal writer

in the history of this state: Witkin. Bernie Witkin. Nearly everybody took Bernie Witkin's course, but there was a black lawyer who had quite a reputation as a teacher.

He would take the people with limited backgrounds. He had taken them, and taken them on through right from the beginning, and taught them law, and got them by the bar. So Terry and Joe and I took his course, along with--

Morris: What was his name?

Wilson: I was just about to tell you his name, and then when you asked me, it slipped my mind.

Morris: Sorry.

Wilson: Bussey. John Bussey. He wasn't much of a practicing lawyer, but he was a brilliant scholar and a fine teacher. Actually, John was the first black judge in northern California. [Governor] Goodie Knight appointed him to the municipal bench in San Francisco. By that time, John was just teaching and doing appellate court.

So we took his course. He was a very fine man to get along with. But he and I used to argue all the time, because I tried to convince him that he ought to change his approach. He did too much lecturing, and I felt that there was an imbalance in the amount of time that he was spending with us in interchanges and answering questions as compared with the lecturing he was doing.

I just argued that we ought to know the law, we're just out of law school. We all went to full-time schools, and we ought to know more about law now than we'll ever know in our lives, but the important thing is, how do we put it together in a bar exam? And how do we answer these questions?

He took it good-naturedly, and he later substantially cut his lecturing down and placed a greater emphasis on the discussion of questions. But he was good. We all passed.

Morris: Great. On your first time?

Wilson: We all passed the first time, yes. My biggest problem in terms of the bar, and I knew it was going to be, was that I would see too much in the questions and I didn't space myself adequately. As you may know now, it's a different bar exam now because it's part essay, and it's part objective, and it has been for about six, seven years.

But at that time, it was all essay. It was three days, with three questions in the morning, three in the afternoon. You were supposed to allocate fifty-two minutes per question. For three days that means that there were six entire sessions. You know, one in the morning, one in the afternoon.

In those six entire sessions, there was always at least one question where I had less than half an hour to read the question, analyze it, and write on it. John Bussey advocated a half an hour of analysis of each question, before you started writing. He hit hard on that. But, inevitably, on the first two questions I would have put too much time in writing, and then I wouldn't have much time for the last one.

One question, I remember, I had fifteen minutes to read it, analyze it, pick the issues out, and write on it. But my strongest facility through law school was the ability to read or listen to a set of facts and get to the issues quickly. That probably was the very strongest part of what helped me; that made it possible for me, I think, to get through law school and to pass the bar exam.

If I didn't have that, I don't think I would have made it. Because I didn't have the time to do all the reading that the others were doing on the outside and this sort of thing.

Establishing a Law Practice

Morris: So how did you use those skills? Did you go find a law office to practice with once you got your degree?

Wilson: When I got out of law school, there was a lawyer, the senior black lawyer in the area, named George Vaughns, who knew me from the YMCA. I came up through the northwest [Oakland] branch, which was then called the Negro branch. He had been on the board for many years, and I came up as a child through it and then ultimately as a volunteer.

I started coaching and playing with its senior men's basketball team at the age of eighteen. So he had known me, and he offered a job in his office. I actually went to work before the results of the bar came up. I went to work on the first of November of '49, in his law office.

I didn't stay there long, though, I was there from the first of November for maybe about fifteen months, and then I left and opened my own office.

Morris: Did you? Business must have been pretty good.

Wilson: Not really. No, not really. But I just wasn't satisfied with the arrangement there, and what was happening. I wanted to strike out on my own and did so. So I opened an office over in what was the south Berkeley--it's probably not open now--the south Berkeley branch building of the Wells Fargo Bank on the corner of Alcatraz and Adeline.

The manager of the bank had a twin brother, identical twin, who was a practicing lawyer in Oakland. They didn't want to let me in to begin with. They didn't want to rent the property upstairs to begin with, and they didn't want Negroes in there, anyway, but he went to bat, and he got me in, at a reduced rate.

I stayed there about two years, and then I moved right across the street. There was a pharmacy there--it's gone down now, but they still do some type of pharmaceutical work--on the southwest corner. Right behind it, on Alcatraz; there was a doctor's office downstairs, Dr. Joel Lewis. I took office space upstairs.

III WORKING FOR CHANGE

East Bay Democratic Club; Career Options

Morris: My chronology says you passed the bar exam in 1950, and then in 1953, you were running--

Wilson: The results came out in '50, yes. Actually, the results came out in December, but the swearing-in was the first week of January, of '50.

Morris: And then in April of '53, you were running for the Berkeley City Council. That's pretty fast movement into the city political scene.

Wilson: Well, I suppose so, but I was very well-known. Number one, I had played baseball for years at San Pablo Park, in Berkeley--even though I had lived in Oakland, San Pablo Park was the mecca, pretty much, for blacks in baseball. They'd had a league there on Sundays for years, so I was very well known, because of baseball.

Then our basketball team, that I had been coaching since I was eighteen, I was still doing it then. I didn't retire from competitive basketball (and it was with this same team, coaching and playing with it, the Northwest Y's Men's Team) until I was forty-four.

Morris: That's marvelous. That takes a lot of time and a lot of energy. Yes. So you attribute your political base to your athletic activities?

Wilson: That's right. Then, of course, for three years, I'd been very active with the NAACP, and we were fighting battles around with the first case, Johnson vs. Pasadena. It was a schools case. I'd already become active, with some others--Clint White, and Charley Wilson, who went to the FEPC [Fair Employment Practices Commission] as a general counsel.

As soon as I started practicing, I jumped right into community activities of that type. Then, of course, there was one

Democratic club, and I joined it even before I started practicing--that was the East Bay Democratic Club. That was a club that the late D. G. Gibson was a leader of. It was built around Byron Rumford and D. G. Gibson.

Morris: Had that started as the Appomattox Club? I came across a newspaper clipping that said the East Bay Democratic Club was formed, and that it was a new organization. But I think it was Byron Rumford who told us about something that he called the Appomattox Club.

Wilson: No, the East Bay Democratic Club had been formed for some years, but it had been dormant. I suppose I played a major role in reorganizing it, and bringing out a lot of new, young people at the time.

Evelio Grillo played a major role in our organization. Evelio was primarily responsible for several black Republicans who changed their registration and became active.

Morris: As Democrats.

Wilson: As Democrats. Clint White, and Don McCullum, and Charles Furlough. Allen Broussard was not one of those, although he was a Democrat, and there was a realtor named McKey, who actually came out here and had a franchise selling a major vacuum cleaner, and then left and went into real estate, and became an inheritance tax appraiser down the line.

So we had some really top people, outstanding people, in the organization, and it built fast, and rapidly, and with being backed by Byron and--

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Morris: Was he [Tom Berkley] part of the Democratic Club?

Wilson: No, he wasn't. Tom wasn't part of the club, Tom was pretty much for going it independently; he was a Democrat, but he was going it pretty much independently. He was one of the first to run for Oakland City Council. As a matter of fact, Tom Berkley had sort of a little unique role on his own.

In those days, he and Byron didn't hit it off. It was a long time before they finally got together. When I was in my senior year in law school--in the junior year, Terry Francois and Joe Kennedy both went to work for Tom in his law office as research assistants. He offered me a job but I couldn't afford it; what he was paying, I couldn't afford to give up my three part-time jobs

to do that work. So otherwise, my career might have been entirely different, because I would have joined with the others in working there with Tom Berkley. But I didn't.

As a matter of fact, when I was deciding to enter law school, when I came out of the service and looked around, I went back to the naval air station, from where I was drafted. At that time I was working in the wing shop, where the repair work on wings was done. I had been pulled into a training program. They had a trainee program, where you could go from shop to shop until you learn all the facets of the business and then become a journeyman aviation metalsmith.

The man who was over that wing shop when I arrived, that was my second shop after I was put in the training program, and I never got out of it, because the head civilian came to me and said, "Look." He was named George Smith, and he was trying to develop an assembly-line approach to the repair work.

When he found out that I had graduated in economics and I knew something about time and motion studies, they didn't want me to leave. They promised me that I would get my journeyman rate without ever going into any of the other shops. I would have, if I hadn't been drafted.

By the time I returned, George Smith was a master mechanic, which was the top level for civilian employees by that time at the naval air station. He offered me a desk in his office, and I thought about it. Then I thought about going back and getting a teaching credential, and thought about the law, which had always been my first love.

I was working at the Y with Josh Rose. I was his full-time associate secretary--combination of physical director and program director. As a matter of fact, I had come close to going into a career, just before I went into the service, in Y work.

I was working under the EEP, the Emergency Education Program, that was a professional program related to the WPA, but assigned to the Y. So actually I was working as a Y secretary right there although I was being paid by the federal government, such as it was.

They were opening a new branch in San Diego. Josh Rose urged me to apply; he was the Y secretary and later the first black councilmember here in Oakland. Josh urged me to apply, and I did. I was offered the job in a twelve-page letter that mentioned the salary on the twelfth page. [laughs] I looked at that, and I said, "No, no way." Otherwise, I'd have gone out into YMCA work.

Concerns for Social Justice

Morris: It sounds like you had some feelings about social justice and that it was time that something happened in the black community. Were those some of your concerns?

Wilson: Yes, yes.

Morris: By the time you got through law school?

Wilson: Yes. You have to remember, I was raised in a city in California where everything was supposed to be beautiful for--and my family having moved here to find a better place to raise their children, where they would have better opportunities, and yet where there were many places that wouldn't serve you food. The only hotels you could stay in were if you could find one that was run by a Japanese. Nowhere to swim except in the estuary or ocean. Little or no opportunity in terms of future unless you were going to become a doctor, lawyer, you know, professional.

And coming up in that kind of atmosphere, and if you'll permit me a moment of immodesty, having been blessed by God with better than average intellect, school came very easy for me throughout, and I was at the top of the classes. [laughs] I was amazed; I spoke at the Naval Supply Center at an annual luncheon of federal managers, a couple hundred people, last week. The person who introduced me I couldn't imagine where he had gotten this--began to talk about my background, "raised and educated in the Oakland public schools and in the ninth grade won a citywide flag contest with an essay on the flag."

My God, I hadn't heard anything like that in so long! Afterwards, I asked him. He had run into, somehow or other, an old friend of mine, someone who had known me from way back. But anyway, what I'm saying is that obviously I didn't even realize it myself, the impact that all this was having on me until later years. Actually until I became a lawyer.

Morris: Dealing with white lawyers in the courts and in the various cases you found you were as competent as they were?

Wilson: I found--when I got out to Cal, for instance, I came from a school that was noted as--McClymonds was known as a shop school. But for me Cal was easy, I didn't have any problems competing with the kids from any of the schools out there, as long as I did a little work.

But what I mean is that I didn't realize the impact that these experiences, the discriminatory practices and segregation and so forth, had had on me until after I had, in later years, begun to reflect on why I had such a tremendous drive to work in the community and work with the NAACP.

NAACP Legal Redress Committee

Wilson: I was chairman of the Alameda County [branch of the NAACP]--when I came out of school. I became chairman almost immediately of the Legal Redress Committee, and then they broke it up as three branches; Oakland, Alameda, and Berkeley. I became chairman of the Legal Redress Committee for the Oakland branch.

I think in my law practice I ran a legal aid office for people who couldn't afford services. Then I realized--I guess it was the impact from what I had experienced throughout the years. I suppose that the culmination of it, in one sense, was my role as chairman of the Legal Redress Committee, and walking into this very same office with this very same desk sitting there, meeting with the mayor and the city manager and the fire chief, to try and convince them that they ought to eliminate the segregated fire department.

Because there was, as you know from talking to others, there was one house only in which blacks could work, down on Magnolia and 34th, right across from Clawson School. Which, one, limited the number you could have in the department, because you could only have the number of blacks it took to complement the house. Two, in terms of any promotions, it was limited for the same reasons.

So we sit in here. I don't remember who was with me, Byron may have been there, I don't know. We put up our arguments, and they sit there. An interesting thing about it is that the mayor blacks out; I never even remember who that mayor was. But the city manager I remember, was Jack Hassler and the fire chief, Lloyd Burke.

When we finished, the fire chief was the only one who responded. He spoke up and said, "If I were in your place, I would be saying the same thing you're saying. And in no integrated fire department in this city."

Morris: How could he see your point of view and still refuse to make some changes?

Wilson: Because he felt that there was a place for blacks, and that was it, and it was not in an integrated society.

Morris: Was the black firehouse supposed to only deal with a fire in a black business, or a home owned by a black person?

Wilson: No.

Morris: They were firefighting in the whole city?

Wilson: That's right. This was in the fifties. A couple of years later, the council passed an ordinance that abolished the black-only fire house staffing.

Morris: Were the other young men that you were acquainted with feeling the same kind of urgency, that it was time to change things?

Wilson: They were. The people I've mentioned, Clint White and Don McCullum, yes, and Evelio Grillo, yes; they were all feeling the same thing.

Campaigns for Berkeley City Council, 1953 and 1955; More on Oakland 1985 Campaign

Morris: Then in 1953, you ran for a seat on the Berkeley City Council. Was the situation in the Berkeley political scene such that you thought there was a real possibility of winning that city council race?

Wilson: Well, I don't remember how I got into that and [laughs] who euchred me into running that race. I suppose it was suggested that, "This will help to develop your law practice in some way by more exposure as a lawyer," or something. I suppose there might have been an element of thinking to win, because in '55, I think it was '55, on a budget with six hundred dollars, I only missed election by maybe around seven hundred votes.

Morris: That's pretty good. There was a piece in the Tribune, on the 20th of February, 1953, which said that the South Berkeley Community Church held a mass meeting to foster your campaign, and that the Reverend John Mickle, who was the pastor, was the temporary chair. Had he been somebody who was really urging you to run?

Wilson: Yes, he was urging a black candidate--I guess we were Negroes then. I remember first we were colored, and then we were Negroes, and then somehow or other we became known as blacks. That's been an evolutionary process, as you know. At that period we were, I guess, Negroes. And he was one of those urging that there ought to be a Negro on the council.

Of course, even today, the election results are close; although obviously the situation has changed substantially in terms of electability, but mainly because the moderates and the conservatives gave up a long time ago, and the moderates haven't any leadership. I guess the last was Warren Widener,[5] and then, as you know, I think that it was generally recognized that Warren never would have lost that race if he'd had any kind of a campaign, but it was just taken for granted that he would win.

Gus Newport was new, nobody knew him, and it was "Gus Who?"[6] It was kind of a joke, "Gus Who?" but Gus Who was backed by the--

Morris: Berkeley Citizens Action, which grew out of the April coalition.

Wilson: BCA, and they were well organized and pushed him in. Even that race, as you may recall, was seven- or eight-hundred votes difference, and Warren Widener had no campaign in south Berkeley where his real strength was. He didn't have any campaign.

Morris: Is that the danger of incumbency?

Wilson: Yes. I've just been saying now we're working hard at putting on a campaign and putting on a strong campaign, but it's getting more and more difficult to convince people that I've got a problem. Becuase I'm hearing it from too many places, "Oh, he can't beat you." Riles is seen as the toughest candidate, and people say, "He can't beat you."

Even though I believe that myself, that's no way to run a campaign. And I'm not running that kind of campaign. What bothers me most is that I could see--there's a fellow out there named Hector Reyna who's run for everything for--

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[5]Mayor of Berkeley, 1973-1977.

[6]Newport was mayor of Berkeley 1977-1985.

Morris: Fifteen years or so.

Wilson: Yes. I don't know, he's been out maybe eighteen of twenty times, and he's developing more and more name recognition. He got ten thousand votes when he ran at large against John Sutter a few years ago. Recently, Reyna ran for two offices; he probably only got away with it because no one challenged him legally, and he got sixty thousand votes in the Peralta Community College district. Granted, that's no big, broad district, and he lost 21,000 to 60,000; but my point is that, having been in office for eight years, you make a lot of decisions.

Every time you make a decision you win a friend and you lose one; you win and you lose. So that there's an opportunity for a certain amount of protest votes going to somebody like Hector. I would hate to have to get into a run-off.

Morris: Because that's just enough to splinter the rest of the votes.

Wilson: That's just enough to splinter it, and my people don't see it, but there is a potential--there are six other candidates besides Hector, I think, and they won't get much of anything but a few hundred here and a few hundred there, and if Hector got a fair piece of it, there might be enough for a run-off.

My concern is I just don't want to have to campaign for another month. Raise more money and this sort of thing.

Morris: Do it all twice.

Wilson: But it is a danger, and I'm hearing it in too many places.

Morris: All you have to do is remind your people to look at Berkeley.

Wilson: That's right. Yes.

More About Berkeley Campaigns

Morris: There was a man named Ura Harvey, who ran for the school board in '53. When you were running for the council.

Wilson: I remember, the storekeeper from south Berkeley.

Morris: Had he been part of your group of young activists?

Wilson: No, no. He was a little older than us, and he was somewhat interested in the community, but hadn't really been politically active. A very nice man.

Morris: There had been a couple of things that related probably more to the school campaign than to yours, but I had forgotten about them in this period of time. There was another candidate, named David Smith. Part of the opposition to him was that he was accused of having allowed Paul Robeson to sing in one of the Berkeley public schools. Had that been something that was going on, then, in the fifties, that there was a problem with a black person as distinguished as Paul Robeson?

Wilson: Yes, I think there was. I'm trying to recall. There had been somewhat of a problem around, that's true.

Morris: Did that have any echoes in your campaign?

Wilson: I don't think so.

Morris: Did the same people, by and large, work on your 1955 campaign, that had worked on the '53 campaign?

Wilson: Pretty much. I guess the base broadened by '55.

Opening a Joint Practice with Carl Metoyer and Wilmont Sweeney

Morris: Then, the next thing that turned up in the Tribune press clippings was your opening a joint practice with Carl Metoyer and Wilmont Sweeney.

Wilson: That's right.

Morris: Did you get to know them in the NAACP activities?

Wilson: Bill Sweeney and I met because Bill had been working for an older black lawyer I knew. Carl Metoyer was younger than I, but I'd known his family, and we're both Catholics, and we're both out of Louisiana, and he lived in the same general area, down in the Clawson School, the Watts tract area that I lived in. So I knew Carl Metoyer. He was a few years behind me in law school, brilliant student. A good lawyer, a very good lawyer. I had been a year meeting with George Vaughns, the man I started with, Clinton White--he was Justice White--Bill Dixon; William C. Dixon, Billy Dixon, talking about the formation of a partnership.

We had spent a year. We got close enough that we had several target dates for opening. I backed off each time, and finally I just permanently said, "I've changed my mind." I wanted to practice with Clint, who I recognized as a brilliant trial lawyer. During my years on the bench, I've never seen a jury lawyer any better than him, he's that good. And George Vaughns was a good friend; an older man, but a good friend at the time. But I finally backed off, and then I began to look around, and someone said that Carl wanted to put something together, so then I talked to Carl.

It was Carl who said he had some preliminary conversations with Bill Sweeney, and how would I feel about bringing Bill in? "Fine, I like Bill, I know Bill, and he's bright, and he's talented, and I think he's going to be a fine lawyer." So then the three of us met and found a piece of property that was up for auction by the city, and bought the property at auction, and put up a building.

Morris: Your law practice must have been doing pretty well by then.

Wilson: Yes. Yes, we were doing pretty well. Sweeney was the youngest in the practice. We built the building for four lawyers, although the way we built it, we could have added on, if we wanted, on top. We had some conversations with Don McCullum. He wasn't too ready to leave the D.A.'s office; he hadn't been out here too long, about four years.

So then we invited Allen Broussard to join us as an associate, with the promise that in the near future we would make him a partner. So we started out, it was Wilson, Metoyer, and Sweeney, and Broussard was an associate in the office. When I left in '60 to go on the bench, Broussard was made a partner, and it became Metoyer, Sweeney, and Broussard.

When I left for the superior court about three and a half years later, a few months after I left the muni court, we got Allen appointed into my spot on the municipal court.

IV JUDICIAL AND MAYORAL CONCERNS

Appointment Considerations

Morris: I remember, yes. Was part of the work of the NAACP at this point, and the East Bay Democratic Club, to stay in touch with the statewide Democratic and Republican people to get some support?

Wilson: Yes, we did. Although, the way my appointment came about was a little different in that [Governor Edmund G., Sr.] Pat Brown had just been elected. He offered to appoint me to what was then the Adult Authority, and I said, "Thanks, but no thanks."

Morris: That's a full-time job.

Wilson: Yes. Then he leaked to the press the information that he was going to appoint a black to what is a state-level cabinet-type position, legal affairs officer. There'd never been a black appointed at that level, serving at that level, in any state administration in California. The person he had selected was Loren Miller; the late Loren Miller, a great constitutional lawyer. He leaked the information because Loren, as a student in college, had made a trip to Russia. And so the Los Angeles papers redbaited him so badly that Pat backed off appointing Loren.

But then he already made the commitment he was going to appoint a black, so he looked around. So he offered the job to Cecil Poole, with whom he had worked. Cecil had worked under him as a deputy district attorney when Pat was district attorney of San Francisco County. So he knew Cecil and Cecil's high level of competence and ability, and he offered Cecil the job. Cecil said, "Yes, if you will promise me a superior court judgeship."

Pat reacted negatively to that, and didn't like that kind of approach.

Morris: Was Cecil saying that he wanted a superior judgeship for himself?

Wilson: To follow. For himself, for himself. He wanted a commitment that when he left the job, that he would be appointed to the superior court. No black had ever been appointed directly, I don't think.

There may have been one in southern California that had been appointed directly, but certainly not up here.

Now, Pat's panicking, [laughs] he's got to find a black to appoint to the job as legal affairs officer.

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Wilson: It's also the executive clemency secretary. And I said, "Thanks, but no thanks. We're in the early years of a new law practice, I'm happy there." Then, as only Pat Brown--you have to know him, he threw up his hands, and then he turned to [Assemblyman] Byron Rumford, who was the only other person in the room. He says, "Byron, what does Lionel want? Sh--." Byron just shrugged. I said, "Pat, I didn't support you because I wanted any kind of an appointment. I supported you because I wanted FEPC [Fair Employment and Practices Commission], and I wanted fair housing, and I believe that you as a governor can deliver them. And that's why I supported you."

I said, "I don't want the job, I wasn't looking for the job." That was like water off a duck's back. He never even answered that, responded to that. He just changed the subject, he said, "There ought to be a Negro judge in Alameda County, there should have been one a long time ago. How about it, would you take it?" He said, "But it's going to be in the Oakland Municipal Court."

He knew that I, although raised here, at that time I was living in Berkeley. I lived in Berkeley for about seven or eight years right after coming out of the service. He said, "But you'll have to move back to Oakland, because it's going to be Oakland Municipal Court. How about it?"

Morris: Were you ready for that kind of a question?

Wilson: No, no. I said, "I certainly agree with you that there should have been a Negro judge a long time ago, and I think there should be. But I hadn't thought of myself in that respect." I said, "There's George Vaughns, who's been around many years, there's Clint White" and I mentioned a few others, two or three.

He ignored that and said, "You let me know when you've made a decision." Once a month for eleven months he had a lawyer who was close to him, and later became a superior court judge, call

me--who was active politically. "Have you moved into Oakland?" That was the question, "Have you moved into Oakland?"

Morris: Oh, that was the clue. If you moved, you were ready to take the job.

Wilson: That was the clue. If I'd moved into Oakland, then I had decided to take it, if I didn't--So then the last time, it was more forceful. The last time, after eleven successive months, the message came, "Fish or cut bait, make up your mind." "Tell Lionel he's got to make up his mind."

Morris: This was somebody that was not in the governor's office as an appointments officer.

Wilson: That's right. This was someone who was very active in Democratic politics, was a major fund raiser, and close to him. I had decided I would not take it. I discussed it with my wife [Dorothy], and told her that I'd made up my mind I wasn't going to take it. Then, before I could convey that information to the governor--I went down to the court one morning on some simple little matter, probably an uncontested divorce.

The case was assigned to the late Justice James Agee. A fine judge, and a fine man, and I'd had a good relationship with him. When my matter was over, he said, "Lionel, do you have a few minutes, I'd like to talk to you." I said, "Yes, I do." So we went into the chambers, and for about thirty or forty minutes, he just talked to me about all of the reasons why I should accept this appointment.

It was common knowledge that it was simply up to me to say I wanted it and I'd take it, and that I would be appointed. He changed my mind. He convinced me that I ought to take it.

Morris: Really. What argument did he offer?

Wilson: He was arguing about the good I could do in the community in that role, and the importance it was to the community and what it would mean to many blacks in the community and those coming before the court,to know that there was a black judge there. That it would give them a greater feeling of security.

Also that it offered potential, that there was a future for me in the judiciary and that he was satisfied that I wouldn't be there too long before I would be moved up to the superior court.

Morris: Was it the fact that it was municipal court that made you reluctant?

Wilson: No, no. Although I did resent the fact that if you were black you went to the municipal court regardless of what your background and experience was. But in my case it wasn't a motivating factor because the superior court required ten years of practice, and I just barely had ten years of practice.

But when I thought of Loren Miller--he went to the municipal court. This man should have gone to the supreme court. John Bussey went to the municipal court. He should have been going to some appellate court. And it was very common practice among whites to go directly from private practice to courts of appeals and the supreme court. But if you're black it was a municipal court.

There weren't that many black judges, anyway. There were none in this area--well, the one, John Bussey. When I went on, there were none in Alameda County and one north of Los Angeles, and that was John Bussey who was appointed by Knight. But southern California, there were, I don't know, maybe two or three, that's all, four at the most. I did resent that, but that wasn't the factor there with me, personally, because I felt I hadn't had ten years yet. I hadn't been that distinguished, myself, in the law, to the point that I could fell that I should necessarily go to the superior court at that time. But Jim Agee also felt that I would move up to the superior court rather rapidly, and as it turned out, I did.

So when I walked out of his office, I had changed my mind. I went back to my office.

Living in Berkeley and Oakland; Municipal Court, 1960-1965

Morris: What did your wife say when you told her you'd changed your mind?

Wilson: I called my wife, and said, "I've changed my mind, I'm going on the bench. I've just had a talk with Judge Agee, and he's convinced me. So we're going to move to Oakland; you'll have to start looking for a place." So she did. She said, "Okay," and she started looking for a place.

Morris: How had you happened to settle in Berkeley when you came back from the service? With your wife and three kids?

Wilson: Oh, I think it was simply a matter that I was lucky enough to get some good housing. First in university housing, down below San Pablo, and then a nice little apartment in--no, I moved to Berkeley just before I left, that's what, for the service. I got married, and I was married for ten months--a friend of mine, an older man who I had become friends with when I was in college as an undergraduate and working as a redcap. He was one of the

senior redcaps, porters. He owned this building that was right across from San Pablo Park, and had kind of a penthouse apartment, which he let me have reasonably. That's how I got to Berkeley.

Morris: Right across from where all those baseball games are played.

Wilson: That's right, right across where all those baseball games were played.

Morris: That's a nice neighborhood.

Wilson: So then we bought a duplex on 62nd and Market, which was in Oakland, the house next door was in Berkeley. [laughs] That's how big a deal it was that we had to live in Oakland. We were buying a home on Glen, and we retained that home on Glen, figuring I'd move up to superior court, ultimately, and we'd move back into it.

Berkeley was a different place then. I never thought I'd see that day when I wouldn't want to be caught dead in Berkeley. We rented the house out. We were renting it to students, and graduate students, and all went well until we rented it to a group of graduate students from another part of the world, out of a different culture. Not that they were bad people, their culture was so different, and what they were doing in the house my wife couldn't take it.

She kept after me, "We've got to get rid of that house. I can't stand it what they're doing in that house." So finally I said, "Okay, all right," I caved in, "Sell the house," and six months later I was--here again I never had to fight to get the superior court. Pat Brown just said, for some time, "Lionel's going to get the next opening," so sure enough, when the next opening came he moved me up to the superior court.

Morris: Did that legal redress committee that you'd been chairman of give you any sense of things that you would like to see happen as a judge, that you then--

Wilson: Oh, yes, certainly it did. Even as a judge, I continued to work with the NAACP, just as Don McCullum has continued to be a leader, to fight all the injustices, the discrimination and the segregation, that we saw around us. So I went on working with the NAACP.

Morris: By the time you went on the bench were there beginning to be some black men and women in the county probation department, and the sheriff's department--

Wilson: Yes, as a matter of fact, the irony of it is that, for instance in the probation department, my youngest brother became the first black senior probation officer in Alameda County. This was a direction that he decided to go, and went into probation work. I didn't steer him in any way into it; it was his own independent decision, that he wanted to get into that field.

Impact of National Sports and Budget Decisions

Morris: That might be a good place to stop for today. I've run over your time, I know.

Wilson: Yes. Although I haven't had a buzz for my eleven o'clock appointment. I don't know what's happened.

Morris: May be sitting patiently out there. Okay, thank you. Do you suppose maybe next week or the next week we could sneak in another session before your--

Wilson: I will try. Just a little tight, you know.

Morris: I understand.

Wilson: So many things keep coming up. The Coliseum is fighting to insure that Oakland will have a National Football League franchise here. The National Football League is meeting in Phoenix, so they've gone to great lengths to set up a team to go down and lobby the league. And they insist that it's very important that I be there.

Morris: I can see that.

Wilson: So, Sunday morning I take off for Phoenix, and I'll return early Wednesday.

Morris: That shoots that week, yes.

Wilson: I've turned down, in the last week, two requests that I go to China, one from the university, from one of the associate chancellors. Last week-end they wanted me in New York to fight another matter that's critical, I think, in this country, and that is [President Ronald] Reagan's domestic budget. They wanted me but only, they said, if you and your wife pay for your transportation and motel when you get back there.

Dutch Morial, who is the new president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, is doing an outstanding job of organizing the key mayors around the country, those they see as having the greatest

political strength, organizing to fight it. A group of us met in San Francisco two weeks ago and then this weekend, as I say. But I just couldn't go. I already had four commitments I had to keep.

Morris: Yes? Did you tell them to save all these things until after the Oakland election?

Wilson: I sent them a strong telegram of support saying, "I'm with you, and just let me know what you want me to do." But it goes on and on.

Superior Court Pre-Trial Release Program

Morris: [It must be a difficult time to be a Democrat.

Wilson: One of the things I really pushed when I went on the superior court was a better approach to bail. We put together a task force to work on that. There was] an officer of the Alameda County Public Defender; the district attorney [Thomas] Coakley; the chief of police of Oakland, and the president of the Alameda County Bar Association. Well, Coakley was bored. He thought everybody ought to go to prison anyway, but I'm talking about a bail, a pre-trial release program.

So after about three months he turned it over to Ed, and Ed Meese was his representative. Because Ed Meese was the heir apparent to replace him, until he got tied up with Ronald Reagan in his campaign for governor and moved off in a different direction. Otherwise, Ed Meese would have been the--

Morris: County district attorney.

Wilson: Instead of Lowell Jensen, Meese would have been the Alameda County District Attorney.

Morris: That's interesting, I never thought of that part of the whole thing.

Wilson: There's no question about it. It was all set up, it was wired, [chuckles] and it was going to happen. It's kind of sad to me; I think that Ed has become--I don't know whether it's his association with Reagan or what--but far more conservative than he was. He [Meese] was more moderate before he left. Or maybe I just--for instance, he was very supportive of the bail for pre-trial release program. After putting it together, I chaired it for a year, and then I turned it over to him.

Anyway, I've had contact there. [Vice President George] Bush invited me back to a small meeting with twelve or fifteen people. It turned out that he wanted support for his zone--

Morris: Enterprise zone?

Wilson: Enterprise zone program. I went back just to see what it looked like, really. But he got into a situation where he couldn't handle the mayor of Baltimore, who was the only Democrat in the room beside me. I took care of that for him, so then I began to get invitations [laughs] back there. Yes, I'm a Democrat, but I'm the mayor of a city of all kinds of people, of all kinds of political persuasions.

I'm proud of the fact that--although a lot of my Democratic friends don't like it--that not once, in almost eight years, has any--I don't even allow it to get into discussions on the floor around any partisan political issues.

Morris: That's tough to do sometimes.

Wilson: It's tough, but I've done it.

Morris: The buzzer did buzz. Thank you.

Wilson: Yes, thanks.

V Oakland Economic Development Commission Chair, 1965-1969

[Interview 3: July 31, 1990]##

A Problem with Mayor Houlihan's Appointments

Morris: When last we met, we had talked about your work on the superior court and we had just gotten to the point where I wanted to ask you about the Oakland Economic Development Commission.

Wilson: OEDCI.

Morris: Right. And you were appointed to that in 1965, according to the files of the Tribune. From those clippings, I put together a little biographical chronology.[7]

Wilson: Yes. Well, actually, I wasn't appointed, I was selected by--well, I guess I was appointed, because Mayor [John] Houlihan was putting the board together and he asked me to chair it, and after some preliminaries with him I agreed to do so.

Actually, my name was brought up in a meeting where they were selecting a board chairperson and Justice [Clinton] White, then Attorney White, I think, said, "Well, the judge won't take it, won't accept it--"

Morris: Meaning you.

Wilson: Meaning me. And I was on the superior court at the time, and so Mayor Houlihan said, "Well why won't he?" And he [White] said, "Well, because of you. He said that he's afraid that you are going to 'try to run the show' and control it and under those circumstances, he won't serve, because--" I had been approached and asked about it and I had told them that.

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[7]See p. viii. See Appendices for selected clippings on Mayor Wilson's career.

So Houlihan committed that he would not interfere with the operation, and not only that, but he wouldn't even serve on the board, and he didn't. And so I took the chairmanship and served for six years.

Morris: What was your thinking? And it sounds as if Clinton White was a close colleague of yours.

Wilson: Very close, yes, he was.

Morris: And had you and he talked about what you hoped that OEDCI might do?

Wilson: Well, I don't know that we had. He had asked me about whether I would take the chairmanship of the board.

Morris: That's something that was of interest to you and your colleagues, that this commission--

Wilson: Well, it was of interest to me, it was of interest to me. It was the anti-poverty program. I had hopes that it was going to do good things for the people who needed help in the city and who were economically depressed, and I had hopes that it was going to provide some jobs and some programs that would produce training for many of the people who needed it and as a base for them, ultimately, for getting jobs.

Morris: Had you had some differences of opinion with Mayor Houlihan that led you to think he might--

Wilson: Yes, yes.

Morris: What were the problems?

Wilson: Well, Mayor Houlihan called me one day and said that there were no blacks on any important boards or commissions in the city, and I don't know whether there were any at all. There may have been one or two on minor ones, but there were none serving on any of the important boards or commissions. And he said he wanted to correct that, he wanted to add, he was thinking of two in, as I recall, civil service, and I don't remember whether the other one was the port, or it was another important board, and asked me for recommendations of blacks to serve whom he could appoint.

And I said fine, and I called together a committee of about fifteen people who were community leaders from around the city, a broad perspective, a real broad and representative group. Although I've been identified as a Democrat all my life, I had several Republicans with whom I was friendly--I guess Clint White

was probably a Republican at that time. Anyway, I made it broadly representative of the community and put it up to them, told them of the call from the mayor and what he wanted and so they, they did not want to sit still for that.

He wanted one specific person for each one, and they insisted on submitting three names for each of these positions, two positions. That was unacceptable to Houlihan when I called him, and we had words about it; he was a very volatile and aggressive personality, and I had to tell him off. And that was the end of it.

Morris: Oh dear, so there were no minority appointments--

Wilson: No. All he wanted to do was he simply wanted us, me, to rubber-stamp a couple of people he had in mind.

Morris: Oh, he already had some candidates.

Wilson: He already had a couple of people in mind, and the committee I put together found that unacceptable and I did too.

Morris: They weren't people that you and your committee would have come up with by, you know, your processes of selection?

Wilson: No.

Morris: And so did Houlihan go ahead and appoint those people that he had in mind anyway?

Wilson: I think he made a couple, he did make two or some of the appointments.

Morris: Did that kind of appointment process make it difficult for you to work with the people that were eventually appointed?

Wilson: No.

From the Ford Foundation Grey Areas Program to the Economic Opportunity Act

Morris: How did the Economic Development Committee go about their work. Did you have some staff?

Wilson: We had a staff, yes. We had a staff which really was a program group.

Morris: Was that when Norvel Smith was director?

Wilson: Well, yes. Actually, yes. I had served on a committee headed by a lawyer named Joe [Joseph E.] Smith who had been a former mayor [1947-1949], a one-term mayor on the council at a time when labor rose--at that time it was stronger--it rose up and I think the whole labor contingent was elected to the city council, and they only lasted one term.

Morris: They sure, yes, disappeared from history.

Wilson: That's right, and they were beaten right after that.

Anyway, Joe was made chairman of the committee that was the policy-making group for the old Ford Foundation Grey Areas program that had started earlier in the sixties. The Ford Foundation had put up a considerable amount of money and Senator [William] Knowland was active in the formation of the group that drafted that program.

Morris: The proposal to the Ford Foundation?

Wilson: The proposal to the Ford Foundation that Evilio Grillo wrote. That proposal was successful and was taken on by the Ford Foundation. They granted I think, first three million and then another two-and-a-half-million later on. That program had selected the Castlemont corridor as the area.

It was in a state of flux at the time, but people were changing and in and out, and they wanted to try to stabilize it. The theory was, let's put some money into this as a demonstration project and see whether we can't stabilize that section of the city.

Morris: Surrounding Castlemont.

Wilson: Around Castlemont High School. So that program was still active when the Economic Opportunity Act was passed in 1964. And Evilio had written them [Ford Foundation proposals], but Norvel became the--I guess Norvel Smith was the first director, was he? I guess he was.

Morris: Are you saying that he had worked with Evilio Grillo on the Ford Project?

Wilson: I'm trying to remember whether Norvel had worked on that project.

Lively District Meetings

Morris: There was a tie-in, if I remember correctly, with the old social planning council in the United Crusade. Is that correct?

Wilson: I don't know, I don't remember that. The way we organized, we organized by districts into seven districts throughout the city. Each district had its own community organization and its district council, and those were the same district councils that exist today, without the same people, but that's right.

So the board was made up of about a little over thirty people, maybe about thirty-two people. The city had three representatives on it, the mayor, George Vukasin, and the late Josh Rose.

The first thing I did as the chairman was to move it out of city hall, where it originally met into Franklin Recreation Center, and we met there for maybe, I don't know, I vaguely recall maybe about six months or so. Then I changed that and we began to meet once a month in a different district each month. We moved the meetings--the major meetings were held each month in a different part of the city in one of these seven districts, and we moved them around the city.

Morris: Did that bring in new people to the meetings and get more people involved?

Wilson: It got more people involved in the decision-making process, and that was the purpose of it. And every meeting for six years, I can't remember a meeting where they weren't literally hanging from the walls, whether we met in recreation centers, church halls, school auditoriums or what.

Morris: According to the articles I read in the Tribune, some of those meetings got pretty controversial.

Wilson: [chuckles] Listen, I'll say they were. In those days, and of course the only security--I was a superior court judge--the only security I had was if I thought that there was going to be a problem and I had good relationships with people around the city.

For instance, there was an organization called GIG, Group to Industrialize the Ghetto, and they were nearly all ex-cons; they all had criminal records. They were all trying to develop an economic base for their organization of people around them and I helped them and supported them and they would keep me apprised. If

there was a rumble, they'd call me and say, "Judge, there's going to be a rumble tonight. What time are you going to arrive and where are you going to park?" And they would meet me there and they would provide my security.

Morris: To get in and out of the meeting.

Wilson: Yes. But I never had any trouble, I actually never had any trouble until the final meeting. They were sure there was going to be a rumble, and there was a rumble, and it was going to be a problem. Sure enough, they met me, and they were there, escorted me in when I walked in, and they were standing around the hall. They assumed the same type of dress that the [Black] Panthers did, and nothing happened. They were standing around, you know, obviously there for security purposes, and nothing happened.

I remember the first time I found it necessary that I make a judgment, and I called the chief of police and said, "Look, I understand there may be trouble tonight. Would you have a couple of people there? I don't want them in uniform." So he did. On the way out, we didn't have any trouble; but I was walking out with one of them who is a friend of mine today, and he said, "Judge," he said, "How often do you have meetings like this where they're this controversial and with this many people?"

And I said, "This is nothing unusual, this is a common meeting." He just shook his head and said, "My God, I don't know how you do it, because, you know, you're just, with no particular security."

And some of them were pretty wild. There was one in particular, a man named Baker who tried to be a real source of trouble, but we managed that. Anyway, my time is up.

Morris: Okay, that's a good beginning. Those were pretty exciting days.

Relationship with City Government

Wilson: We were one of only two in the nation of all of the programs around the country that were able to become independent and we operated without any controls of the city. The city government had no veto power over our conduct. We handled millions of dollars without any scandal, and we handled our own funds. This is the three members of the council who served, the mayor and the two members of the council who served. They had one vote, just like any of the other thirty-two or whatever it was people who

served on that board. That was the only input that the city had, officially.

Morris: Was it a big struggle to reorganize as an independent body out from under the city?

Wilson: No. There was a struggle to get the independence, but once we got it we were staying the same body and the body didn't change, whereas it was a real struggle to get that independence.

Morris: How did you do that?

Wilson: I don't know, I guess I just went to the people and got enough community support, and we just insisted on it and kept pushing it and arguing it and got it.

Morris: So am I right that this would require the city council voting to sign off their role in charge of the economic development organization?

Wilson: I'm not sure whether they did, because if they had, if it was that way, I imagine they might have tried to regain control at one time or another. They could have; it just would have taken a majority on the council to regain control, and that never happened; not before I left, anyway.

V OAKLAND POLITICS

[Interview 4, August 29, 1990]##

Campaign for Mayor, 1976

Morris: This morning I thought we might pick up with a question I raised about your decision to go from the bench and the Oakland Economic Development Corporation into running for mayor. When did you start thinking about that?

Wilson: Well, it didn't originate with me. There were some people in the community came to me approaching the 1973 election and suggested that I consider running for mayor at that time. This must have been in 1972. I looked at it and informed them, no, that I wasn't interested.

Morris: Because you had a good relationship with Mayor John Reading?

Wilson: No, no, simply because I hadn't thought of getting into that sort of--I had been on the bench just about eleven years or twelve years, and I was thinking more in terms of a future on the bench, so I just--it had never occurred to me that I might get involved politically in that way.

Morris: What changed your mind?

Wilson: Well, some of the same people and a few others came to me four years later in 1976. By then I guess I'd had about fifteen years on the bench, and by then I'd been through all the chairs and had presided over various phases of the court, the criminal division a couple of times, and the full court in 1973, and the appellate department, so I was viewing my work on the bench in a little different way by then. I suppose that I had reached a point where I found the idea just much more appealing.

Morris: Were there changes in the political picture here in Oakland that made the mayor's spot more interesting?

Wilson: Well, at that time, when they came to me four years later, I knew that John Reading was seriously considering not running, which made a significant difference, too. Not in terms of a question of any relationship I had with Reading, because I didn't have any relationship with Reading, but simply in terms of whether it made sense with regard to the element of success of such a campaign or not.

Morris: Does that sort of translate into whether or not it was possible to elect a mayor who was black? Had that been a consideration earlier?

Wilson: Oh, that was a consideration, yes.

Morris: Was there a really strong concern in the black community for a black mayor at that time?

Wilson: I felt there was, and there had been other people that had talked about it and had been talked about as potential candidates. There had been considerable talk around John Reading's side about a person, one man in the community. And then another one who couldn't make up his mind which way he would want to go if he went, whether he'd want to go with Reading's group or whether he wanted to go with the Democrats on the other side.

Morris: Would that have been Otho Green?

Wilson: No.

Morris: Was Otho Green a serious candidate or a serious possibility?

Wilson: I didn't look upon him as such at the time. No, that was the late John Williams, who headed up the Economic Development Department. As a matter of fact, he headed up the redevelopment agency.

Morris: Does that mean you and he would have worked closely together on your interest in the Economic Development--

Wilson: He and I had talked about it, yes. We would have worked very close together. He had an untimely death; he died of cancer, I think, a relatively early death; he was still in his fifties.

But he and I were friends and we had talked about it, and he had talked about the approaches that had been made to him from time to time. The approaches that had been made to him had been from the John Reading people.

Morris: That's interesting, he was already in the city government working for the city at that point?

Wilson: He was the redevelopment director. His bust is out there in City Center.

Morris: I know, I know. He must have been quite a remarkable fellow in--

Wilson: He was, he was. He was a very, very charismatic personality.

Morris: How come he decided not to run for mayor?

Wilson: I think because they didn't give him sufficient commitment in terms of money. Not for his pocket, but for his campaign. He felt that there simply wasn't a sufficient commitment there. There was talk, a lot of talk, but he didn't see any concrete evidence of willingness and ability to raise the money.

New Oakland Committee

Morris: Where were people like Bill Knowland and the Kaisers and some of the people at Clorox Company in this kind of discussion?

Wilson: I don't know. I wasn't having any discussions with them, and when I did get into it, they supported my major opponent. There were a number of other candidates, but the major opponent was the president of the school board, a man named [ ] Tucker, and they supported him.

The Tribune endorsed him and the business community got behind him and raised money and he had sort of a lot of money for his campaign. An interesting sidelight of that was that almost to the date of his death, Edgar Kaiser from time to time said to me how sorry he was that he went along with the business community and did not support me in my first campaign. He used to send this big plant once a year, I don't remember whether it was Christmas or something, almost right up to the time of his death.

Morris: Even though, on the Economic Development Commission you had worked with people from Kaiser and from--

Wilson: Well, it wasn't the commission. I had worked with them when I was chairman of the anti-poverty board and also when the Black Panthers became very active. The Panthers had picketed two liquor stores, both on Grove Street, owned by the same person, a black man. One on Grove around 24th and one on Grove and about 54th.

Then they had said to the press and announced publicly that when they completed that then they were going to look at the white businesses with a view to going after them on the basis of integration and employment.

At that point, a group of the leading business people, including Edgar Kaiser and Bill Knowland and then chairman of the board of Safeway, Quentin Reynolds, a group of them had gotten together on someone's recommendation to form an organization called the New Oakland Committee, which exists today.

What happened is that they raised the seed money for the organization. Then just about when they thought they had the three caucuses formed--a business caucus, a labor caucus, and a minority caucus--when they got to the minority caucus, there was what was called the Black Caucus, made up of the late Judge [Don] McCullum--he was not a judge then--Don McCullum, Elijah Turner, and Paul Cobb and a young fellow named Galloway who, at the time, was active with the NAACP. They said, when they were approached about this organization, "Fine, yes, but we have to be the exclusive representatives of the black community." That was unacceptable to the business leaders who were putting this organization together, so everything stopped.

Then there was the chief administrator that they'd had for Kaiser, who worked with me then in the anti-poverty program and who apparently said to them, "Look, despite what the Black Caucus says, if Lionel Wilson is willing to do it, he can put together that minority caucus for you."

So they approached me and I said, "Well," and I looked at it and I said, "Okay, I'll do it, only on one condition and that is that I get assurance that once you form the organization, that you're going to be going to the meetings, or at least send your second-level aides in to represent these corporations and that you're going to continue to be active," that is, that these people who were CEO's and so forth would continue to be part of the committee.

They made that commitment to me and so then I sent the Black Caucus a letter saying, look--or a call, I don't remember--saying, "Look, I'm going to form it, the minority caucus, and you ought to be represented in order to be a part of it, but you can't call the shots--"

Morris: You can't tell the committee what to do?

Wilson: Yes, so they backed off of that, when I did that they backed off of their position and agreed to become a part of it, and that's how the New Oakland Committee was formed.

Morris: Did some of those people later turn out to help in your campaign?

Wilson: It was formed out of fear when the Panthers announced that they were going to then move--after they had completed their attack on this black businessman--that they were going to move into the white business community.

Morris: Did you see the Panthers as a serious threat, or did you see them as having some ideas that needed to be discussed or were worth discussing?

Wilson: Threat to whom?

Morris: Well, to the comfort and good future of Oakland.

Wilson: Well, I saw it from a dual perspective. One, in terms that I never have condoned violence and confrontation as the answer, solution to social problems. And the other one was that I saw the Panthers as a catalyst to bring about some meaningful change.

Morris: Kind of following up all the work that the NAACP had been doing for years?

Wilson: Yes, well, doing the same thing but doing it in a different way.

Morris: And did some of the people who were active in the Black Panthers then come along into your campaign and into the mainstream?

Wilson: Ultimately, when I ran for mayor, they did. The Panthers were active in my campaign in 1977.

Now I had been told that Huey Newton had said that if I had been willing to run in 1973 that Bobby Seale would not have been a candidate then. I don't know whether that's true or not.

Morris: Yes, because Bobby Seale, as I recall, was pretty much a young firebrand.

Wilson: Well, yes, I suppose he was. He ran in 1973 and got into a runoff against John Reading. Of course in the runoff he was very, very badly beaten.

Campaign Organization

Morris: Looking through the newspaper clippings on that campaign, I found that you had kind of an exploratory committee called the Friends of Oakland that [County Clerk] Rene Davidson was chairman of. Do you remember how that worked or what role Mr. Davidson played?

Wilson: Rene became one of the leaders in our attempt to win the mayor's seat.

Morris: Was he one of the people who originally had been encouraging you to run for office?

Wilson: I don't know that he was. It was more I think around the late Dick Groulx and some labor people.

Morris: Was that when Dick Groulx was head of the Alameda County Labor Council?

Wilson: No, I think he was a deputy then to someone else; this was before he became the secretary-treasurer.

Morris: But would some of those early people have been from the labor movement wanting you to run?

Wilson: Yes.

Morris: Who else do you recall?

Wilson: I think there was a lawyer who was on the school board about that time named [Seymour] Rose.

Morris: By the time that you did run, was Ron Dellums--he was already in the Congress--would he have been somebody you worked with at all or who offered some support for the campaign?

Wilson: I don't remember Ron being in my campaign. I supported Ron from the first time he ran for Congress, but that --

Morris: When he was still more or less a candidate of the traditional Democratics or of the new coalition of more activist political people?

Wilson: Yes. I wasn't a part of that, but I did support Ron.

Morris: What I was kind of wondering about was, in Berkeley there's been a lot of attention given to differences of opinion between the more traditional Democrats and more activist--

Wilson: I was more in line at that time with the traditional Democrats.

Morris: But was that difference a problem in Oakland, in trying to put together a campaign and run for mayor?

Wilson: Well, Oakland was sort of just a big blob. There was nothing, no real organization other than-- The onle real organization, I guess, was the East Bay Democratic Club around Assemblyman Byron Rumford.

When I really took a good look at Oakland, I was amazed to find how little organization there was.

Morris: That's interesting when you're talking of a city this size.

Wilson: Politically, I mean.

Morris: I understand. How did you go about putting together a campaign? Did you get a professional manager?

Wilson: Well, as a matter of fact, I had a little group of people around me who were urging me to run once I indicated I was interested in running. There was a group of people around me, mostly pretty moderate Democrats, black, white, and Hispanics. I raised much more money than I anticipated I was going to be able to raise. Considerably.

Morris: More money was raised than you thought?

Wilson: Ultimately, yes. But I didn't expect to raise that kind of money, so I was looking for someone to manage the campaign. I wasn't thinking of any of the high-powered consultants who were around at that day.

I selected Sandre Swanson, who was a young fellow--he had started to work for Ron, that's right. I remember now because Ron let him have a leave to run my campaign, and large numbers of people around me were very upset because Sandre was inexperienced. He'd never run a political campaign except in college, so he obviously had no track record and no history, but I had confidence in him. And he did a good job, I thought.

Morris: Good, good. Well, sometimes a young man makes up in energy for what he may lack in knowledge of some of the ins and outs of the town.

Morris: Did you and he put together an organization by district or ethnic group or what kind of a plan did you work out?

Wilson: Well, we tried to do it by district rather than by ethnic group.

Morris: What areas turned out to give you most support?

Wilson: It was pretty broad in support in the flatlands, north, east, west Oakland.

Morris: Was that still the time when you had committees of lawyers and committees of doctors and committees of educators--

Wilson: Well, I did that; I did put together committees of doctors and committees of lawyers and a committee of teachers and a committee of cosmetologists and committees of ministers.

Morris: Did you spend a lot of time out in the neighborhoods and in the churches talking to people?

Wilson: Yes, I did.

Morris: Did Mr. Swanson go with you on all those, or was he going out to other areas?

Wilson: I don't remember, but I'm sure he did.

State Political Figures

Morris: Was Byron Rumford himself able to put some time in on strategy?

Wilson: Yes.

Morris: How about Nick Petris?

Wilson: Nick was supportive, but I don't remember him as being particularly active in the campaign, other than endorsing and supporting.

Morris: I guess I was wondering about how much interaction there is between a local mayor and council election and the assembly and senate races.

Wilson: Well, up until the last few years, there was considerable interaction. But then, by that time, [State Senator] Nick Petris was pretty well entrenched. Then Byron and then [Assemblyman] John Miller, who took his place, each of them was pretty well entrenched. Then [Assemblyman] Lockyer moved in behind the

assemblyman from Alameda who was killed by an automobile, [Assemblyman] Bob Crown, who he was just beginning to develop his thing. And particularly in the early years, well, even the first, say seven or eight years of my holding office, I had a close working relationship with the legislators. They were very supportive of the city issues and have been consistently so.

Morris: How about [Assemblyman] Tom Bates?

Wilson: Even Bates, when the chips were down. Bates and I never really saw eye to eye. Even in the early days, it was kind of a tenuous relationship.

Morris: How many people who worked on your campaign had the time and energy to stay around and help once you, you know, in appointive positions or committees or anything like that once you got into the mayor's office? Was there much carry-over?

Wilson: Only in a general way.

Morris: At what point did you feel like it was a good possibility you were going to get elected?

Wilson: I always thought I was going to, from the time I decided to run--

Morris: Did you! Good for you, good for you!

Offer of Appointment to the State Court of Appeal

Wilson: When the governor's office said to me, "Look, have you decided whether you're going to run for mayor or whether you're going to move to the court of appeals?" And he was offering me the court appointment to the court of appeals and asked whether I'd made that decision, and I said "Yes, I have." But I didn't say I'm going to run for mayor, I said, "I'm going to become the mayor."

Morris: So you turned down the appointment to the appeals court in order to run for mayor. Was that a tough decision?

Wilson: No. It would have been and I might have gone a different way, and I've often wondered about that, if I had known that I was two or three years younger than a judge in southern California who was a distinguished jurist who was a year ahead of me on the court. He was appointed to the municipal court in Los Angeles a year ahead of me and he was appointed to the superior court roughly, give or take, a year ahead of me. He was a distinguished jurist. I felt

that there was going to be a black on the supreme court of California, but I thought it would be Justice [Bernard] Jefferson. If I had known that he was older, then the chances are his age would preclude him. That's the only reason he wasn't.

Morris: And Allen Broussard was appointed instead.

Wilson: Well, it went through other possibilities before it got to Allen Broussard. Allen ultimately was appointed [in 1981], yes, but there were some other ramifications. There was a lawyer in Los Angeles, a former Cal football player who was offered the position and turned it down, said he couldn't afford it.

Morris: He was making more money in private practice than he would on the bench?

Wilson: Yes.

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Wilson: He offered me the court of appeals, he didn't offer me the supreme court. Well, but down the line. Anyway, it might have made a difference, if I had thought when the time came, that I would be offered the supreme court. But, as I said, I thought it was going to southern California. I've never regretted it, though.

Morris: Was this Jerry Brown [Governor Edmund G. Brown, Jr.] you talked with, or was it all done through the appointment secretary?

Wilson: Which appointment?

Morris: The possibility of going on the state appeals court.

Wilson: I guess you enter politics and you get a feel for what's going to happen and you get to know the people close. Tony Kline, who's now a justice of the court of appeals, was the legal affairs secretary, and I had gotten to know Tony well.

I pretty much well knew that I was in line to be moved up to the court of appeals, just like I never asked for a promotion to the superior court. But Pat Brown just started saying, "Lionel Wilson is going to get the next opening on the superior court." So [later on] when the governor's office says--I guess maybe it was Tony--[one day] while I was in the governor's office, said, "Well, have you made up your mind whether you're going to the court of appeals or are you going to run for mayor?" And that was as much discussion as there was.

Morris: It's kind of iffy; doesn't somebody say, we'd like to appoint you to the appeals court.

Wilson: Well, not really, not in the real world.

Morris: You make a major decision like that based on this sort of informal discussion that's in the air?

Wilson: Well, if you think there's any question about it or you think that it's something that may or may not happen if you--I was satisfied that, although I hadn't been formally offered appointment, that it was coming.

Morris: That's very valuable. It takes a lot of intestinal fortitude to continue on in public life at that level.

Wilson: Well, I wasn't that ambitious anyway, in terms of moving up from a muni court, for instance. Some of my fellow judges who ultimately went to superior court were, you know, they were just red-hot to go to the superior court. I was doing a job in the muni court and I was satisfied and happy doing the job I was doing and I wasn't worried about movement to the superior court. I never asked for it, the governor just started talking about it himself.

Morris: Were you concerned that there wasn't enough diversity on the court so that there were some questions that perhaps were not being dealt with?

Wilson: Yes, I felt so.

VI THREE TERMS AS MAYOR, 1977-1990

Responsibilities and Accomplishments

Morris: Could we talk a little bit about what you hoped to deal with as mayor of Oakland, what you saw as the pressing issues and, you know, how it felt to go from the bench into running a city the size of Oakland?

Wilson: Well, if I had been in the same position that most judges are in, it would have been entirely different. But I had chaired the anti-poverty program for six years from right after the act was passed until December 31st of 1969. And I was a hands-on chairman and I was into everything in and about the city.

While I was chairman of the anti-poverty program I started putting together the first anti-drug program in the city of Oakland. Actually, it was the first program that was put together in the Bay Area. And I put together the first formal pre-trial release bail program and I put together the first on-the-job training program for the city of Oakland, so I had been involved in--

Morris: On-the-job-training for city hires, for city employees to bring in new kinds of people.

Wilson: So I had been involved in so many different ways in the city's activities that this was not a new world for me when I moved into it, other than I had not been official--well, I guess I was an official part of city government because the anti-poverty program did represent the city of Oakland. But even at that, I was successful in taking it more to the people than almost any other city in the country.

There was only one other city that, as I think, that was able to go independent. That is, my anti-poverty board ran the program. We controlled the money. The city had no control over it, had no power over the money that was allocated to us in that program.

Morris: Did that cause some problems for the city council?

Wilson: Yes, for the mayor, mainly.

Morris: Mayor Reading. But when you became a member of the council as mayor?

Wilson: No, by then, that program had moved on. Model Cities had come along and replaced it and that program was no longer alive.

Morris: The anti-poverty program. But the Model Cities--

Wilson: Things that had followed it were there.

Morris: Model Cities, as I recall, also had its own elected board. I was wondering if some city council members saw some of these new decision-making bodies as kind of a threat to the city council?

Wilson: I'm sure they did.

Morris: Were there some city council people that you were particularly comfortable with, that were more likely to support you?

Wilson: Well, when I came on, in terms of the city council, the city council had three representatives on my anti-poverty board. One was the mayor, the other one was the late Josh Rose, who was the first black council member, and George Vukasin, who was a leader on the council.

The first thing I did was to call George after I was elected and said, "I'd like to talk to you." "Fine!" he said. "John Reading never talked to me," so he was happy to talk to me. I sat down and, although John Reading and I were constantly fighting over the anti-poverty program, I had never had any quarrels with George Vukasin while he was on the board. And we sat down and talked and he was happy to have a relationship with the mayor and vice-versa.

So I moved in with a much stronger position than normally a mayor would have had, a new mayor coming in, especially coming from a different medium, because I had George Vukasin supporting me. And he brought with him three or four votes.

Morris: More from the middle-of-the-road or business community?

Wilson: Yes, that's right.

Oakland Raiders

Morris: Well, good strategy, good strategy. Could we take just a couple of seconds each to tell me some things that have gotten a lot of public interest like the Port of Oakland and the Raiders? Many youngsters reading your oral history are going to think first about Lionel Wilson and the Raiders.

Wilson: Like the voters did. There's no question among the politicians that that's what killed me.

Morris They left, you know. They were everybody's favorite local citizens and then they left, all while you've been mayor.

Wilson: That's right, and they'll probably be back while I'm mayor. At least the decision, probably, to come back.

Well, any one of those subjects, to even talk about them, are very involved. To just make a passing reference to them would be to do them an injustice.

As far as the Raiders are concerned, there was a lot more to it than most people understand. Al Davis simply had made up his mind that he was going to move. He wanted to move, and he thought Los Angeles has a far more fertile field of opportunity for support in numbers and money, and that was it. He decided to move the team. He had made up his mind to move it, in my opinion, and he had complete control.

He had won a lawsuit in a fight with a major stockholder. He just had a contract, and even though he owned some stock, he was only a minority owner. But then came the lawsuit, which was presided over by Judge Redmond Staats--and his contract prevailed over the equity interest of the owner of the majority of the stock. And that gave him the power. Out of that lawsuit, the court found that that contract he had gave him complete power to do anything he wanted to with the Raiders.

Morris: That's interesting when the city and county also have an interest in it because the city and county built the Coliseum.

Port of Oakland

Morris: How about the Port of Oakland, which in some ways seems to be a more important factor in the city's economic picture?

Wilson: Well it is, it is. It certainly is. In terms of economics, it's the most prolific and the most important economic factor, if you want to take a single one in the city, in relation to the city. The Port of Oakland simply was a port that, somewhere back years ago someone abused power and, as a result of it, the people gave it semi-autonomy.

Then there was a far-seeing visionary port director [Ben Nutter] who foresaw that the then wave of the future was going to be in container shipping.[8] He moved the port into that area and they got the jump on all the other ports.

But it was inevitable that as the other ports like Seattle and Los Angeles and Long Beach recognized the merits of focusing on container shipping that there were some physical factors which meant that, ultimately, they were going to pass up the city of Oakland in terms of ultimate productivity. And it's not really a reflection on the Port of Oakland, it's just facts of life, distances between Seattle and the Far East and the amount of money that these larger cities like Los Angeles and Seattle have to invest. Long Beach with its tidelands oil money had far more money to invest, in addition to some physical factors which relate to the distance the ships have to travel from Tokyo, for instance. So it was inevitable that they would pass up Oakland.

Regional Government

Morris: What about the long-running question of regional government? From Oakland's point of view, from your perspective, has it seemed at any point realistic or to anybody's advantage--

Wilson: Well, it would be realistic if it was done logically and objectively, if it was put together in terms of where the strength was and where the center of activity should be. And there's no question but what it's Oakland.

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[8]See Regional Oral History Office interviews on the Port of Oakland, in process in 1991.

San Francisco's dead, as some top key business people have said who were close to it. They said, even before they moved American President Lines over here, that they ought to recognize that, with container shipping there just was no future for San Francisco. It could not be the leader because, for instance, the trucks. It's a peninsula, and it isn't like here where the trucks come over land and they can just drive up to the port and drive out with the goods. Of course, that wasn't really what killed San Francisco at the time, but over a period of time it would have happened anyway because of the geography.

There were politics in San Francisco which played a major role in its demise. San Francisco still wants to control the bay. Dianne Feinstein, when she was mayor, was trying to find some way to regionalize shipping in the ports, with a view to San Francisco having the power. It didn't make any kind of sense and that's why she couldn't succeed.

Morris: Did you put any energy into some of these committees to address these regional issues, not only the port, but water quality and transportation and--

Wilson: Yes, I have. I have been involved in--

Morris: Do you see any progress?

Wilson: I think progress has been made, and it's a difficult problem. When you're talking about power, you're talking about taking the power away from each city and giving it to a regional board, or committee, or commission, or whatever it's going to be. It can just change the whole balance of power in terms of who controls what. It gets into not only the political factors, but the economic factors and so forth, you know.

Advice to Young People

Morris: One last question, what about some good advice for young people coming up, as to politics or government, where they might find opportunity and what it takes to be the mayor of a major city in the increasingly complicated world.

Wilson: Well, I think that if a young person has any interest in government and if a young person understands that politics should not be a dirty word, that politics is something that invades every facet of life from the cradle to the grave of all of us--the very air we breathe, the clothing that we wear, the way the coffin is

made up. Every facet of life is influenced and determined by political decisions somewhere.

So it's so important to life, and I think that Oakland has become one of the cities where citizens have become more and more awakened to the fact of what an important part politics plays in their lives. And the citizens' participation is probably far more active here than almost any city in the country.

It does play a very significant role and I think that in terms of anyone who ultimately was interested in becoming mayor, you have to find some way to get there, you know. You can't just say, well I just decided I want to be a candidate. The people decide that. You can--technically, anyone can file, if you come up with the fees and just live in the city and be of minimum age and so forth and file. But in terms of ultimately winning--the things that go into winning--many factors can come into play from one four-year period to the other.

More About the Raiders

Wilson: For instance, a year ago when we were negotiating with the Raiders, I told some of the people representing the Raiders, "I was initially skeptical of the marketing plan that was put together to try to bring back the Raiders. But once I decided that it was a plan that was good for Oakland, a plan that in my view had a tremendous financial potential for Oakland, as mayor I had no choice but to support it without regard to what I thought of the Raiders."

And I did, but knowing all the time that it was a political negative, because part of it was that the media plays such a significant part and the media had jumped on what they saw as the ultimate cost, six hundred million dollars over a fifteen-year period. It was a fifteen-year lease and all this money [that would be spent by the city if the Raiders agreed to return to Oakland]. They emphasized, they gave people the feeling that this was money that could have gone into the schools or could have gone into other social programs, when as a matter of fact there was not a dime that was going to be available for the schools. The marketing program, the money was coming from the consumer, from the people who bought the tickets, and that's true if the Raiders come today.

But it became a politcal football, and it was built up, and when the Ross people--Richie Ross is a bright and creative political consultant, and they realized what was there and they just laid on that. And Riles jumped on it, and the press was saying over and over and over, were giving people the impression that, yes, why weren't these monies being used to do some of the more important things? And if there was money there, their point was sound, but there was no money there because the marketing plan, every dime has to do with the sale of tickets. Every dime of revenue was entirely related to the sale of the tickets. But that wasn't the way it was sold to the people, you see.

So then people became so aroused from all over the city and I could just see it coming, they were so upset--all you heard was, "The Raiders, Raiders, and all the money that's going into the Raiders that ought to go to the schools," in particular.

And there was no support from the press, the media, to educate the people and say, hey, wait a minute, you're way off base, there's not a dime there. Every dime has to come from the sale of tickets, not from any government funds, not from any tax funds. And I saw that building up over a year ago and I told them that, but--

Morris: There was no way to talk to the Oakland Tribune?

Wilson: No, no. Come on, absolutely not, no way!

Morris: The Tribune has not been supportive of you as mayor?

Wilson: No.

Morris: Even though the publisher is now Bob Maynard?

Wilson: Even though, yes, yes, very much so, even more so. It's been even less supportive under Maynard than it was even under Bill Knowland.

We could never get that message over, and when you're trying to deal with all the other city issues, there is only so much time and energy that you have to put into it.

And I told them, I told one of the key Raider negotiators, I said, "This is going to be a real negative factor for me, but I have to go with it because I believe in it in terms of what is best for the city."

Then the second factor [that was brought up] was that it won't work, that this is some phony marketing plan that isn't

going to work. But ultimately, because of those signatures that they were able to get--and here again without money, these signatures were gotten in highly questionable ways, many of the signatures. But they got the signatures and so the deal was dead because the Raiders said, nothing doing, we won't be a part of that. But then two days later--I had set up on the Tuesday night that we killed it, I had already set up a meeting for that Friday. I had switched it, I had put [city council members] Dick Spees and Aleta Cannon on it and I stepped out of it. The Raiders had indicated they were still interested in negotiating with the city and county and it took off.

And for instance, the papers made a big thing about, well, now it's different because now there are no guarantees. Half the guarantees had been taken off publicly by Davis with the first plan, and the other half, privately, he had already said, "If we get a deal, I'll take those off too," you see, so there wouldn't have been any guarantees then, either. But now that became a big thing.

I set up an advisory committee of citizens, [including] some of those people who had got the signatures, Cornell Maier who put money into getting the signatures, and John George.

Morris: Oh, you put him on the following committee, after that petition?

Wilson: Oh, yes. I put them all on that following committee.

So then they said, "Well, we want a new and independent evaluation of the marketing plan." So one of the most prestigious worldwide financial institutions was hired to do an evaluation. What did they come back with? There's no risk, minimal risk, minimal risk to the city.

But what happened is that under the first plan, yes, technically the city was taking the risk, and this is what was played up by the media. But now Al Davis realized, when they had that pre-sale, and what happened, he realized that there was no risk, he said, "Okay," when we started the discussions all over, "I'll take the risk, but you have to understand where the risk goes, that's where the money goes, the biggest part of the revenue."

See, under the first plan, the city would have gotten the best part of the revenue, because technically they were the risk-takers. But under the second plan, the new one, the one that's probably going through, Davis becomes the risk-taker. The city is eliminated as the risk-taker, and the county, so the biggest part of the money goes to Davis. You can't argue with the

logic when he says, "Okay, wait a minute now, you want me to become the risk-taker? I agreed that you could have the biggest part of the funds, why, as long as you were the risk-taker. But now that I'm the risk-taker, I have to get it." And that makes sense.

Morris: Well, that sounds just like some of these deals in the business world. Amazing, amazing. I know your next appointment is waiting. Thank you very much for explaining so much about Oakland history and government.

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Appendix A
Oakland Tribune
May 19, 1977

City 'Is Changing'

Wilson Tells Plans

By BILL MARTIN
Tribune Political Editor

Mayor-elect Lionel J. Wilson seemed to take casually the fact that he is the first black mayor of the City of Oakland.

He was reminded of that at his first full-fledged press conference yesterday just a few hours after he had defeated Dave Tucker, president of the Oakland Board of Education, by about 5,600 votes.

Asked if he believes that his victory means that the Oakland electorate—long considered to be on the conservative side of the political spectrum—has changed, Judge Wilson said:

"Yes, it does. I believe that there is a willingness now to work with a mayor who happens to be black."

Tense in the late stages of his vigorously fought campaign with Mr. Tucker, Judge Wilson yesterday at noon appeared relaxed, easily handling a staccato string of questions from a large news media corps was optimistic on what he has to do when he takes office July 1.

Earlier in the day, he had received congratulatory telephone calls from Sen. Alan Cranston, Gov. Edmund G. Brown Jr., other Democratic party leaders, and even Republican Mayor John H. Reading, who pledged his cooperation to make the change of city administration flow smoothly.

Now, he told reporters, he and his wife, Dorothy, were going to take a short vacation before taking up his mayoral chore and, he admitted, do some thinking about how he was going to make a living on the $15,000 Oakland pays its mayor each year.

The mayor-elect will resign from his $50,000-a-year Superior Court bench at the end of June. He took a leave of absence early this year to run for mayor and has been without salary since.

He said he will have to practice law to make a living while serving as mayor, whether in association with his wife—also an attorney—or some firm.

But the questioning mainly dealt with what he would do as soon as he took office and Judge Wilson displayed a take-charge attitude.

For example, how does he feel about the Port of Oakland? "The port and the city will not continue to be divided as they have been for so many years . . . The port ought to contribute more to the City of Oakland both financially and in terms of providing employment. Those are the critical areas."

How much confidence did he have in Police Chief George Hart?

"I believe that George Hart is a very capable police chief," he said. "From what I've seen, he's a man who is sensitive to the problems of Oakland and I look forward to working with him."

Did he feel the same way about City Manager Cecil Riley, to whom the city charter entrusts broad administrative powers?

"I expect in the next few days to sit down and spend some time with him," the mayor-elect said, "so that he can have a better idea of what my concerns and my interests are in terms of providing for the needs of Oakland. He can express himself and we can get off on the right foot."

Pressed as to what would happen if he finds it difficult to work with the city manager, Judge Wilson said, "I expect that we shall be providing the city manager with stronger and more direct policy and I would expect he would comply with those directives."

Heavily backed by the Democratic party in his campaign, Judge Wilson was asked whether his victory meant a repudiation of the city's business community, which has long dominated city hall.

He said, "My administration is not and will not be antibusiness and I don't interpret my election as a repudiation of business. I never at any time during my campaign took that kind of a position.

"I've said all along that I felt that I have a history of being able to work with those people . . . I expect to have strong support and cooperation from the business community."

Judge Wilson departed from the upbeat theme only when asked about how he felt the mayoral campaign was conducted, and it was apparent he still had a sour taste.

"I would like to put that behind me, but obviously the campaign was conducted on a very low level right from the beginning," he said, referring to the Tucker campaign.

"It started out that way and it wound up that way," Judge Wilson said.

But that wasn't unexpected, he said, because of the reputation of Mr. Tucker's campaign manager (Ron Smith) whom Judge Wilson described as "Mr. Dirty Tricks."

The mayor-elect declined to get specific about what "dirty tricks" were tried by his opposition.

Appendix B
Oakland Tribune
May 22, 1977

Party Pros Elected Wilson Mayor

By BILL MARTIN
Tribune Political Editor

The Democratic party staged a political tour de force in electing Judge Lionel J. Wilson mayor of Oakland.

Mayor-elect Wilson did not win the office all by himself.

He was elected mainly because the Democratic party spotted him as the first high-class candidate it could adopt to take over a city hall which over the years escaped their grasp.

Four years ago, it was the Black Panther party's Bobby Seale taking on Mayor John H. Reading and no one wanted to take part in that one. Mayor Reading buried Seale.

This time, there was a Superior Court judge with impeccable credentials, someone who had gotten his feet wet with Oakland's social problems in the 1960s, when the timid were running for cover.

But still there was the problem of putting over a black mayor in Oakland, where the whites still hold a slight voting edge.

Judge Wilson did it—beating Oakland School Board President Dave Tucker by approximately 6,000 votes—but only because of the pros.

These aides, who move from campaign to campaign from year to year, must remain, at their request, unidentified, but they share a political realism that does not surface in all campaign rhetoric.

perspective

The candidates talk, as they should, about such issues as unemployment, crime, business expansion and so forth.

Behind that, however, are the campaign professionals who must put together the nuts and bolts.

All sides agree that the Democratic party drones, in this case a mishmash of national and state legislative staff aides, glued together an effort which ended up with Oakland electing its first black mayor.

Judge Wilson's victory really started a few years ago, when those legislative aides to congressmen, state senators and assemblymen convinced their bosses that they should take a more active role in Oakland politics, a hitherto nonpartisan exercise.

Their advice prevailed, and Gov. Edmund G. Brown Jr., Sen. Alan Cranston, Reps. Ronald V. Dellums and Fortney H. (Pete) Stark, Assemblymen Bill Lockyer and Tom Bates, and on and on, threw their muscle behind Judge Wilson.

A Tucker aide said after the defeat, "Look, the most popular political figure in the Eastbay is Dellums. He doesn't have to come into town, but he's still a jolt. Tucker doesn't have anything like that behind him."

But it wasn't only the glamor of Dellums that made Judge Wilson a winner. It was troops. As predicted even before the election by Sandre Swanson, Judge Wilson's campaign manager on leave of absence from Dellums' staff, whichever party could marshal the most voter turnout volunteers would win the election.

"They put out 1,300 precinct walkers election day and with the good weather, that did it," a Tucker aide said.

"I was praying for rain, it was the only way we could have won," he added.

Sources close to both sides did not think the television debates made much difference in the outcome because they came late in the campaign.

Tucker people believe those three debates would have been more effective if they had been aired earlier, to give voters a chance to digest the contrast in personalities between Judge Wilson, who at times appeared irascible, and Tucker, who was stolid, unflappable and uninspiring.

The news media, the pros agree, made the Oakland mayoral contest a horse race because they paid attention to it. Television, radio and Bay Area newspapers followed it closely.

That attention startled both camps. It forced each side to do a lot of research on the issues and to think about how their candidates looked and talked.

"You made us spend a lot of money and time on preparing our candidates for something more than just baby-kissing," one campaign aide told a media group.

And Judge Wilson and Tucker did just that. Bit by bit, during the campaign, they revealed themselves on the clearcut issues and how they would handle them.

Regardless of some "dirty tricks" charges in the election's aftermath, both Tucker and Judge Wilson ran high-class campaigns.

Behind the scenes, on both sides, was the black and white issue. Campaign tacticians knew it would be a factor in the voting, but neither side used it openly or covertly.

Even Judge Wilson, who in victory appeared somewhat troubled by the course of the campaign, admitted that the voters of Oakland elected him as a mayor "who happens to be black."

The Tucker camp knew they had a tough, if not hopeless task, from the start. Tucker's name identification factor was low and Judge Wilson's was high. Tucker spent his money to get his name known.

But the Democratic party's voter registration in Oakland and its first-time cooperative effort to back its own mayoral candidate, was too much for Tucker and a downtown business establishment which dominated Oakland city politics for many years.

Appendix C
Oakland Tribune
July 10, 1977

Huey's Bad Timing

By BILL MARTIN
Tribune Political Editor

Some Democratic Party insiders are still groaning about Black Panther Party leader Huey Newton's timing of his return to Oakland to face murder and assault charges.

"Here's Lionel Wilson, the city's first black mayor, trying to establish his credibility with all segments of the community, and this has to happen," one said with a grimace.

Mayor Wilson, who already has had private meetings with top Oakland industrial and business leaders to assure them of his sensitivity to their problems, received strong election campaign support from the Black Panther Party and one of its other leaders, Elaine Brown.

Now Mr. Newton, who fled to Cuba to avoid standing trial, says he's returned because the "political climate" has changed at home with the election of Jimmy Carter as president and Wilson as Oakland mayor.

Mr. Newton told a clamorous airport crowd, which included Ms. Brown and Black Panther Party members, that he fled the country because local heroin dealers had put up $10,000 for his assassination.

"I'm asking Mayor Lionel Wilson to help rid our community of the evil sellers of heroin," he declared.

One Democratic Party source remarked: "It looks like Newton is trying to politicize his pending trial and it sure compromises Mayor Wilson."

What can Mayor Wilson, a former superior court judge, do about it?

"I hope he does nothing and says nothing," the source said. "He can't very well publicly turn his back on a group which supported him for mayor, but he can't very well get involved in this Huey Newton thing, either."

Actually, Mayor Wilson has no credibility problem as such. Despite some charges that he was a liberal judge too lenient with criminals, he won widespread support in his mayoral bid from within the legal profession.

Why Riley decided to resign

From his vantage point as The Tribune's Oakland City Hall reporter, Lester On, before taking on another assignment last year, observed the start of administration of Lionel Wilson and the clash with Cecil Riley

By LESTER ON
Staff Writer

The behind-the-scenes story between Mayor Lionel J. Wilson and City Manager Cecil S. Riley, whose resignation was accepted by the Oakland City Council last night, is basically one about two men who could not have been more different from each other in background and philosophy.

Upon taking office last summer, Wilson wasted no time in letting Riley know he wanted to take the city in a different direction—one that he hoped would mean jobs for the high number of unemployed in the city.

For the first two months, Wilson lashed out at Riley at the Tuesday night meetings of the Oakland City Council whenever he felt Riley was not being responsive.

In recent months, that criticism has abated. But, in truth, the differences between the two men were never quite resolved.

Even before he took office, Wilson went to see then-Mayor John H. Reading about Riley's performance. But Reading, on his way out after 10 years in office, was noncommittal.

The unflappable Riley, privately, was on the receiving end of occasional angry notes from the fiery Wilson. He thought, however, that as Wilson got accustomed to the job the criticism would abate.

Analysis

He thought that Wilson's insistence and authoritative manner stemmed from his years as a Superior Court judge.

After all, Wilson had exploded not only at Riley but at John Sutter and Mary Moore, liberal members of the council, as well.

But Wilson and Riley crossed paths in Oakland long after life's harsh experiences had made them what they were—poles apart in background and approach.

Wilson, a hard-nosed tennis player who likes to rush to the net, might well have played major league baseball if Jackie Robinson had broken down the barrier sooner. "I've had to fight for everything I've got" was the way he put it at one interview.

On the other hand, Riley was a protege of previous City Manager Jerome Keithley, who brought him over from affluent Palo Alto. When Keithley left in 1972, the City Council quickly hired Riley to take over. Acceptance was instant.

LIONEL J. WILSON
Not a ceremonial mayor

Given the divergent backgrounds of the two men, it is not difficult to understand why they didn't get along.

Wilson, painfully aware of the high unemployment rate among youth in the city, tackled the problem immediately as soon as he got into office.

He scored Riley and his staff for not being more aggressive in affirmative action. He knew the city was slow in spending federal community development funds, which are designed to upgrade low- and moderate-income neighborhoods.

Still, Wilson had no choice but to tolerate Riley because he didn't have the votes on the City Council to fire Riley. Perhaps that is why the public criticism ceased while the simmering continued.

Riley, usually a warm, sensitive man, failed to help his cause when his conservative approach caused several run-ins with Wilson last year.

Ever mindful of the city charter and what it says about the respective duties of the mayor and the city manager, Riley told Wilson that, as a private citizen, he could meet frequently with Police Chief George Hart as long as Hart had the time.

But once he took office, Wilson was told, he would have to go through Riley to see Hart.

Wilson did not react visibly when he heard this but his irritation was not difficult to imagine.

Later, when Wilson had taken over the office, Riley and Toni Adams, the mayor's administrative assistant, argued over what the charter prescribes for the two positions.

Riley wound up reading the pertinent sections to Adams. When Wilson heard what happened, he called Riley into his office and, well, chewed him out.

What Riley failed to recognize was that Wilson never had any intention of being a figurehead or ceremonial mayor.

Instead of separation of administration and politics, the reason why the city manager form of government came into being, Wilson wanted his office to be effective beyond ceremony, beyond rigid, narrow interpretations of the charter.

He wanted the city manager to join with him philosophically and work as a team in solving the city's unemployment and economic problems.

But Riley, a quiet and private person, didn't quite see it that way. He sought to preserve his administrative turf and found it difficult to take the broad brush that Wilson wanted him to take.

In his early years, Riley was a more aggressive city manager, venturing into the community for various meetings. However, that brought only chastisement from Reading.

Last year, a large group of East Oakland residents converged on the Oakland City Hall to press Riley to get the city's housing rehabilitation programs moving. Although aware that the group wanted to talk to him, Riley sidestepped the confrontation.

It was left to Assistant City Manager Gerald E. Newfarmer, who was the one actually responsible for the day-to-day operation of the city, to accept the group's petitions and find some way of diplomatically turning the group away.

One ominous sign that Riley

CECIL S. RILEY
Instant acceptance

was in danger came last August when the City Council decided what pay raises to give the city's administrative staff. For Riley and several others, the increase was only 2 percent. He would say later, "They zapped me."

For all the differences that existed between the two, Riley probably could have survived until next year, when five City Council seats will be up for election.

Wilson, the city's first black mayor, has repeatedly emphasized that he is mayor for all of the peoples in Oakland. He is on excellent terms with City Attorney David A. Self, now the acting city manager.

The problem was that Palo Alto was not Oakland and that Reading, a conservative Republican, was succeeded by Wilson, a liberal Democrat. There could not have been a bigger flipflop of political philosophy from one mayor to the next.

Thus, the demands on Riley changed—and he disliked the changes enough to call it quits.

Appendix D
Oakland Tribune
February 22, 1978

Appendix E
Oakland Tribune
February 27, 1978

The people around Lionel Wilson

This is the first of a two-part series on Oakland Mayor Lionel Wilson's aides and advisers Today: the inner circle.

By SCOTT WINOKUR
Staff Writer

In their own view the people around Lionel Wilson and the mayor himself are like Davids battling Goliath. Their approach must be original and their aim true if they are to have a positive effect. And it wouldn't hurt having the Lord on their side—helping to get the City Center project fully under way, for example.

Because impressive credentials and the best intentions may not count much in a city some believe waits to die, fiscally and environmentally.

Asked which of Oakland's many problems must be solved for Wilson to earn high marks at the end of his first term, Assemblyman Bill Lockyer, a strong supporter of the mayor's, said: "Picking one is real hard."

The Democratic legislator, whose district ranges from Castro Valley to East Oakland, then cited the following: economic revitalization, jobs, crime, housing and minority hiring.

Interviews with more than a dozen Wilson aides and advisers and the mayor himself show that other major problems perceived in and around city hall are:

- a charter giving real power not to the mayor and his assistants, but to a city manager;
- a sometimes-pernicious image of Oakland that makes it difficult to stir up sustained interest in the city;
- higher expectations among Oakland's minorities that may go unfulfilled;
- the Jarvis-Gann initiative on the June ballot which, if passed, could bring the city to its knees by slashing property-tax revenues.

Nonetheless, Lionel Wilson and his people—mainly black, male and in their 50s—are here and they are working hard. And the mayor is thinking about 1980. "In order to achieve my goals I may find it important to seek a second term. And ... it may well develop that I seek a charter change," he told The Tribune.

Wilson and others believe at least one major goal already has been attained, communicating to Oakland's minorities the fact that the welcome mat is out at city hall these days.

* * *

Lionel Wilson was a fine athlete in his youth; today, at 62, he plays an admirable game of tennis. As mayor, he operates like the play-making guard on a basketball team, going to his teammates only in areas where they are strong. The result is that hard and fast distinctions among groups of advisers can't be pushed too far with the Wilson administration. Some people advise him some of the time, others on other occasions.

One associate summed it up by saying the mayor is a "loner." Another said he "keeps his own counsel, ultimately anybody else will have a limited influence on him."

Certainly, there is no Jody Powell or Hamilton Jordan in city hall. And Wilson has no confidant as close to him as Bert Lance was (and reportedly continues to be, unofficially) to Jimmy Carter—unless it is Mrs. Wilson, whose judgments, the mayor said, are incisive but perhaps too biased in his favor politically.

Toni Adams, his chief administrative aide, handles correspondence, determines who sees him and represents Wilson at meetings he cannot attend—for example, a gathering of businessmen concerned about plans for the downtown area. While a U.C. employee, she worked "very closely" with Wilson during his term as presiding judge of the Alameda County Superior Court (chairing the criminal justice committee of the grand jury.) Later, Adams found time after office hours to help out during the mayoral campaign. Nevertheless, she said today it's difficult for her to contest the view, held by others, that she remains "politically naive."

She interrupted doctoral work in public administration to serve at city hall, theoretically as a liaison with municipal departments because of her academic training. But Adams frankly doubts that the "concepts" of the classroom—some of which she's learned from Golden Gate University instructor Egil Krogh, an ex-Watergater she admires—have had a significant impact on her city hall experience. "A willingness to work hard" is the main thing Toni Adams actually brings to Wilson, she asserted.

Others have felt the 31-year-old aide, with greater access to the mayor than any administration figure, also brought what amounted to an obstructionist approach to her duties. She was overprotective of the mayor's time, they said. The charges sting Adams, who in her own words is "a very sensitive person."

"The press has portrayed me as the iron woman," she complained. "That makes it harder to get people to really understand" that the mayor cannot deal personally with the 300 or so monthly requests for his presence.

"I'm the person on the end of the phone so I'm fair game," added Adams, ruefully.

* * *

In November a handsome, well-spoken Methodist minister named Charles Belcher took over the other office that flanks the mayor's. The "Mr. Outside" of the Wilson administration, Belcher's job is keeping the lines open between city hall and the community, particularly church-oriented black neighborhoods. "Perhaps I can facilitate meaningful dialogue," he said. Like Toni Adams, Belcher is paid $20,000 a year and is flirting with a doctorate—in ministry.

Belcher's relationship with the mayor began in the late '60s when Wilson headed the Oakland antipoverty program. As pastor of Downs Memorial United Methodist Church and president of the Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, his path and Wilson's crossed. Eventually Belcher would feel free to call on the judge when the Alliance needed legal advice.

"The tradition of black ministry has not been a separation of the sacred and secular worlds. It's part of the nature of our calling to work for the liberation of the black people," Belcher, 39, explained. "At election time in the black church there have been occasions when we (black ministers) have taken the ballot and indicated which candidates and issues would be worthy of consideration, which would be good for the city at large."

Eloquent and trim, Belcher—a star half-miler in college—would seem to be an effective advocate for whomever he is backing. During the mayoral campaign, he appeared on Wilson's behalf at NAACP affairs, school meetings and meetings of community groups. He admires "the judge" and "gravitated toward him" before Wilson's candidacy. More typically, however, Belcher has been drawn to candidates he said "some people would consider leftists."

He admitted his daily duties so far have been ill-defined, beyond being the person at city hall "who can suggest some ethical dimension," but predicted his "low profile" will yield to a more prominent role on the mayor's behalf, probably among neighborhood groups in East and West Oakland.

Meanwhile, the mayor looks to him as a spiritual counselor and, sometimes, as the target of mild jokes. "He kids me a lot about the ministry. If I come in and he think's I'm wearing a nice suit, he'll say, 'Reverend, I see the sisters have been treating you well.' Or he'll call me 'The Reverend *Mister* Charles Belcher.' "

The people around Lionel Wilson

Continued from Page 11

The minister's evaluation of his city hall experience so far: "humbling."

* * *

Neither Tom Adams nor Charles Belcher is invited when Wilson gets together with Don McCullum, Norvel Smith, George Scotlan and Zachary Wasserman to talk about moving Oakland toward fiscal health, his chief goal.

The gatherings are irregular and the same people aren't always there. But while Wilson and his associates quietly try to discourage the view among observers that he has an "inner-circle"—this would run counter to his widely professed aim of maintaining an open administration—he does concede that Scotlan, McCullum and Smith are men he sees frequently and men whose opinions he holds in the highest regard. Zack Wasserman sometimes makes a fifth member of this group, whose primary members are McCullum and Smith, close associates of Wilson's for the last 20 years.

McCullum succeeded Wilson on the Superior Court bench; some people around Lionel Wilson wouldn't be surprised if McCullum attempted to succeed Wilson at city hall as well.

The two men appear to be entirely different. Where the mayor seems reserved and intense, McCullum is extroverted, relaxed and self-assured. During an interview in his chambers he said that among his goals as a Wilson adviser is attracting new businesses to Oakland. Fortune 500 companies weren't quite enough, declared McCullum; he wanted "the top 10 on the Hit Parade." Then he mentioned the names of some of the biggest corporations in the world. "I'm very, very pushy on creating capital instruments for the establishment of economic stability in the community," McCullum said.

A "conservative radical" who believes he brings to Wilson "the feeling of" the NAACP, professional law enforcement and a number of neighborhood groups, McCullum doubts that Wilson will be able to fully satisfy the voters who put him into office. "But that's good," he said, " Any leader should be pushed."

* * *

After a phone call to keep abreast of a developing campus situation—a large marijuana plant had been discovered under cultivation on university property—Dr. Norvel Smith, associate vice chancellor for student affairs at U.C. Berkeley, turned to the question of Lionel Wilson.

"There's no doubt I represent two things to him: a close friend whom he trusts and one of the few people he's never had a major philosophical conflict with over the years. Also, I represent a cold bureaucratic type and he trusts my professional judgment."

Smith was appointed to the Port Commission by the mayor after critiquing the city manager's office as a member of Wilson's transition team. "If he had to make a decision tomorrow on city government, I think he would call me," he said, citing his participation in a recent effort to persuade Bullock's department store to locate in Oakland City Center (the issue remains unresolved).

Smith described himself as "a left-of-center liberal Democrat" who gets most of his ideas on international affairs from the Manchester *Guardian*, on domestic issues, it's the *New Republic*.

The 53-year-old career educator, a native of Philadelphia who studied educational administration at Berkeley, has a distinguished record of public service in the Oakland area. As first head of the city's human resources department, he directed the Oakland antipoverty program (which was under a board led by Lionel Wilson) until 1968, when he became president of Merritt College—and the first black junior college president in California. After five sometimes-tumultuous years at Merritt, Smith in 1973 left for the U.C. post he holds today.

He said he believes it's necessary for Wilson, his "mentor," to take *risks* in office. "With that fine career behind him, he can afford to." The net result? "I think we're going to see some quasi-revolutionary moves coming out of his leadership."

* * *

There were times back before the Second World War when George Scotlan saved Lionel Wilson's neck. It was only a game, true—basketball at the YMCA—but Wilson often played like a man possessed. "He was a guard, fast and feisty," recalled Scotlan. "Anytime a beef would break out he'd be taking on the biggest man on the other side. He was going to save everybody! We always tried to restrain him."

Scotlan, 55, is a tall, low-keyed man with a deep voice who once he thought he could make it as a professional baseball player. Today he is a U.C. official, chairman of Oakland's Parks and Recreation Advisory Commission and a member of the Alameda County Delinquency Prevention Commission. The closest he comes to the basketball court or any playing surface is the stands. And Lionel Wilson usually is at his side. "I guess we haven't missed a track meet here at Cal in years," Scotlan said. "In essence it's ... a kind of special friendship mainly tied in with our interest in sports. Just two guys who get along together."

Scotlan's politics go about as far as the backyard fence. "I complain about high taxes like everyone else." But he helped out during his friend's campaign, organizing parades and social gatherings. And Wilson taps him for a particular kind of advice. "I like to think of myself as a pretty wholesome, *whole* individual," he said. "I've been married 31 years and I've raised six kids. I think I represent the solid family institution, someone you can reach out to and get the pulse of the people. I just tell him how I feel. When it comes to problems of young people, mine is a strong position: whatever we do for the city, we have to bring the young people along. We can't just let them stand back and watch."

Did Scotlan believe the mayor actually could positively affect the quality of life in Oakland?

"If I were to say no," Scotlan replied, slowly, "the balloon for a lot of people would break. I think we have to *think* Lionel Wilson can ... The people have to have something out there they can be living for."

* * *

One day during the summer before the 1977 election Zachary Wasserman, a 30-year-old attorney out of Stanford who studied with state Supreme Court Chief Justice Rose Bird and practiced before Wilson, told Wilson he wanted to help in the campaign, ever since then the two men have worked closely, Wasserman *gratis*.

His office conveniently is located on 15th Street, directly across from city hall, and he's in and out of the mayor's office frequently. If this administration has a Stu Eizenstat—Jimmy Carter's point man for domestic affairs—it is Wasserman.

The attorney: "I suppose what I like to say when pressed is that I'm counsel to the mayor."

Wasserman has been involved with economic development plans, state programs for Oakland and the affirmative-action hiring plan for Hong Kong U.S.A. "The fact that I am not there all the time means in part I have the time and distance to look over things, be a little bit of a troubleshooter." He also headed the mayor's transition team and wrote a number of speeches for Wilson.

Wasserman said he thinks like Wilson—and that's the key to their relationship: "There is a good play between us." Though he's a liberal Democrat who first got his feet wet politically working for John Tunney, he declined to characterize his contribution to the Wilson administration in ideological terms. "It's more practical," he said.

"One of my jobs was to put together in six weeks as good an administration as possible ... I think we did a fairly good job, but I think we could have done better."

Tomorrow: The outer circle.

Appendix F
Oakland Tribune
February 28, 1978

Lionel Wilson's outer circle

This is the second of a two-part series on Oakland Mayor Lionel Wilson's closest associates.

By SCOTT WINOKUR
Staff Writer

Lionel Wilson's outer circle includes a housewife who argues in public with him and a reserved, soft-spoken corporation president who admired John Reading, the mayor's predecessor.

Between these two poles—in actuality, city council member Mary Moore and Clorox president Robert Shetterly—fall:

• A populist council member, Carter Gilmore;

• A liberal attorney with a strong interest in the environment, council member John Sutter;

• Two state legislators, Bill Lockyer and Nick Petris, who possibly will carry legislation that would increase dramatically the city's control over business;

• A behind-the-scenes operative long active in Eastbay Democratic politics, Bill Cavala;

• An independent stalwart of Oakland's business community and one of the leading attorneys in the area for a generation, publisher Tom Berkley.

Some of these people—the elected officials—obviously were thrust upon the mayor by the voters. Others are his acknowledged natural allies in the immediate community.

* * *

Mary Moore believes John Reading and the city councils during his years in office "didn't really like Oakland."

"They had a depressed feeling about Oakland. The Oakland they liked hadn't existed for 20 years and they resented the changes," Moore said. "Lionel Wilson's election was the end of, really, a dynasty. The Knowland-GOP dynasty."

A personal style that at times verges on boldness characterizes Moore, 44, who in the April 1977 citywide election tabulated more votes than any candidate but one, including Lionel Wilson.

The lack of office space had rankled her ever since she joined the council. So, in January, Moore transported cartons of personal files to council chambers, which she then pronounced her own before a crowd of newspaper reporters and photographers. It was a grandstand play by a woman who nonetheless is capable of telling a reporter, "I'm not a public person; it's hard for me to focus on myself ... 24 years of being a wife and 21 of being a mother doesn't lend one a large ego." (She later was assigned space.)

Moore's politics are liberal Democratic, for 15 years she served as a party worker. Among her "heroes," however, is radical organizer David Dellinger, "someone who will devote a good part of his life to things he believes in and is always honorable..."

She said she sees the mayor formally and informally several times weekly. On occasion they come into conflict because, as Moore said, both are "independent, strong-minded people." But she thinks they share "the same world view—a higher, humanist one."

"We had a minor row at a council work session," she recalled. "One journalist said she thought one of us was going to hit the other over the head! We were debating fast-food establishments ... the degree of control that should be exercised. My point was that establishments like that should be in appropriate areas so that they are not destructive to neighborhoods.

"The mayor's view was that we need jobs so badly that we should not be thinking in terms of limiting anything. He roared at me, 'Have you ever heard of a *poor* environmentalist?'

"What I think," Moore went on, "is that the destruction of the environment hurts the poor before it hurts anyone else."

* * *

Last summer Carter Gilmore, Oakland's lone black council member (in addition to the mayor), created a minor stir after Billy Carter used the word "nigger" at an Oakland A's party. Gilmore, a onetime regional officer of the NAACP, demanded an apology, the President's brother refused, Billy said he hadn't intended it as a slur.

Gilmore was campaigning at the time and he took pains to deny that he merely was seeking publicity. In others this might have been difficult to swallow, in Gilmore it was not. There is a directness and simplicity of style to this former Texan that distinguishes him from other, perhaps more highly polished, members of Wilson's inner and outer circles.

In November, Gilmore accompanied Wilson to San Antonio Villa, a troubled East Oakland housing project. Tenants complained vigorously about garbage problems. Gilmore told them to phone him when cans began to overflow, promising to come out and have a look himself. "I have lived in public housing and I know what it is like," Gilmore, a 51-year-old personnel manager, said at the time.

What is Gilmore's contribution to the Wilson administration? A "people's perspective. I'm not playing any games," he said, noting with pride that despite an income that would enable him to move away, he has remained in the same East Oakland neighborhood—62nd Avenue—through bad times as well as good.

Every home in my immediate area had a Carter Gilmore sign during the election. How could I move now?" he asked.

* * *

Of the four-person liberal coalition on the city council—Wilson, Moore, Gilmore and attorney John Sutter—only Sutter is a veteran of the Reading years, when he frequently clashed with the former mayor on issues ranging from the war in Vietnam (Sutter sponsored a resolution calling for a U.S. pullout) to political campaign tactics.

"Reading is suffering from a God complex," Sutter once told reporters.

With Moore, he makes up the white, environmentally-oriented half of the coalition, temperamentally, he appears to be the more cautious and controlled of the two.

Prior to the emergence of Lionel Wilson as the dominant Democratic candidate in the mayoral race, Sutter, 49, was regarded as a possible candidate (he challenged John Reading for the office in 1973), today he is vice mayor of Oakland.

Sutter's special contribution as a council ally to Wilson comes down to the matter of memory. "I think he sometimes asks me what happened before, because I've been here since '71. Or I volunteer." Sutter also believes he's especially useful when certain nuts-and-bolts questions emerge:

"My ... background helps in dealing with the baloney. People will ask for a variance. They'll say if we get a variance we'll crank out umpteen goodies. (But)," Sutter continued, "we have to be careful we don't get inflated ideas about the jobs a local investment will turn out. People will threaten you: 'Give us what we want or we'll leave Oakland.' You have to be leery..."

* * *

Democrat Nicholas Petris represents Oakland in the state Senate. In the Assembly, the city has three legislators, none of which represent Oakland alone. They are Democrats Bill Lockyer, John Miller and Tom Bates. The latter two currently don't figure as largely in Wilson's plans as do Petris and Lockyer, according to one of the mayor's top advisers.

"In terms of dynamics you're going to get a lot out of Lockyer," the adviser said. "His career is just beginning. ... Petris is at the end of a career."

Both men, added the adviser, may be asked to carry legislation now in the planning stage that would give the city bonding power (for purposes of economic development) and the authority to establish business tax incentives—and disincentives—in order to better regulate Oakland's economic climate.

Lockyer is a stylish, outgoing young legislator whose political career dates back, he says, to the sixth grade. Hanging from the walls of his Oakland office are photos of the dead Kennedy brothers and slain Oakland schools superintendent Marcus Foster, and a "Star Wars" poster.

He was very active on the mayor's behalf during the campaign. "Maybe more construc-

Continued on Page 12, Col. 1.

Continued from Page 11

tive," he said. "than any office-holder type I'll tell you what my advice was during the campaign. I said, 'Do what's right.' I think Lionel Wilson has very good instincts."

Lockyer, whose district includes East Oakland, San Lorenzo, San Leandro and Castro Valley, wants voters to review the mayor-city manager sections of the charter, sections that hamstring any Oakland mayor who wants to take serious initiatives.

"We definitely need to put that issue before the voters," said the assemblyman.

* * *

Most people who go into politics relish exposure; William Cavala prefers anonymity. It's unlikely his name ever will appear on a ballot, but the names that do appear – predominately California and Eastbay Democrats – often as not owe something to this youthful U.C. Berkeley political scientist who once roomed with Assemblyman Lockyer.

Cavala is an analyst of government, a tactician and an ideologue. "I'd say I'm a *party hack*," he jokes. The *party hack* has worked for Assemblymen Lockyer and John Miller, D-Alameda, Jesse Unruh, Joe Alioto, George McGovern and Lionel Wilson. "I spend time studying politicians because they fascinate me."

Observers describe Cavala, 35, as "shrewd," a "very effective clever, behind-the-scenes troubleshooter."

Because he doesn't have to answer to the voters Cavala is relatively free to take unpopular positions. And right now, when Big Government is anathema even to liberals, Cavala is able to

Lionel Wilson's election was the end of a dynasty, says one associate

maintain a steadfast New-Deal approach to the problems of government.

"My presumption," he said, "is that if I am ever of any use it's because I believe the country was built by people who were afraid of government and as a consequence split up its jurisdictions into 100 different (political entities)."

"I think you have to put the pieces together if you're going to achieve the goals people reasonably expect from government at this point in history."

One such goal is jobs. Cavala helped Wilson attempt to pick up the pieces after the city lost out on a $17 million U.S. Department of Labor grant that would have created work for thousands of young Oaklanders.

"I spoke to him – just to suggest that I thought he ought to take a look at our situation in Washington and maybe spend some more time back there. To shore up our position with the administration. I thought he had to re-evaluate the role the city's lobbyist plays in Washington. Is that the right person? Does he have the right connections? I doubted it. We don't have the grant."

For the record, some weeks after the grant fell through, the city declined to renew its contract with the lobbyist.

* * *

In terms of personal style, the differences between free-wheeling Tom Berkley and Lionel Wilson are enormous. One is somewhat Falstaffian – anybody who's ever heard Berkley's booming laugh or seen him slap his knee in delight knows there's a robust jocularity to the man. The other is Oakland's answer to Prince Hal, an audacious beginner determined to have a serious impact.

Unlike Shakespeare's creations, however, Tom Berkley and Lionel Wilson lack the bond of true friendship. Said Wilson:

"Our relationship goes back a long way, but it hasn't been close. I have been seeing more of him. The interesting thing is that when we talk about national, international and local problems it's amazing how consistently we see them – and we're very different."

Berkley, 62, publishes the Oakland Post, a newspaper oriented to black and Chicano readers. He also operates a large Oakland law firm and has developed housing tracts, apartment complexes and shopping centers in this state and Nevada.

At the same time, Berkley says, his heart and mind are open to left-leaning movements. As a young man he organized orange pickers in Southern California. Later, while a law student, he carried a card in Harry Bridges' dock-workers union. And, in 1958, Berkley journeyed to Cuba to witness the rise of Fidel Castro. Today, he claims, Black Panthers are welcome in his office.

"If people want to call me a conservative Uncle Tom, let them! But I feel that I'm part of a world movement that's trying to change the posture of the underdog.

"I know *how to make money*. I know how to use the capitalist system. But that's not what I'm into.

"Down the line my desire is to help Lionel Wilson make this a model city that's half black and half white and in the process save the nation. Because the nation's in trouble."

Berkley's hope: 10,000 persons, 75 per cent of them Third World, find jobs here during the Wilson administration.

His goals: "As port commissioner, I'll do what I've done the last nine years – attempt to influence the port – to make jobs available to Oaklanders. (and) as a Wilson adviser, help minority people."

* * *

The view from Robert Shetterly's 24th-floor office would be superb if the flatlands of Oakland were anything to look at. But they are not. Large open spaces where homes and businesses used to stand suggest past devastation and the lack of any commitment to the future.

Luckily the Clorox president appears to have a good imagination. He can envision a hotel and convention center just outside his window to the south and, to the west and north, other new buildings – all part of the City Center project to which Shetterly, as head of the Oakland Council for Economic Development, is very strongly committed. The subject dominates his 2-3 weekly meetings with the mayor.

"The crime rate is important to smaller businesses located away from the central district. The larger corporations don't seem to have any serious concern with crime." That's how Shetterly dismisses the fatalistic theory that downtown Oakland can't be revitalized as long as it remains a place many people – typically, members of the white middle-class – choose to avoid.

Is the color of his skin an advantage for Wilson in the drive to revitalize Oakland? In contrast to most others around Lionel Wilson, Shetterly says no.

"I don't think the racial or political affiliation is too important. Certainly John Reading was just as determined to see that the economy of Oakland is stimulated as anybody. I'm a registered Republican. However, that difference doesn't get in our way at all in my opinion."

Has Wilson done anything that particularly impressed Shetterly, whose Clorox Corp. – with Kaiser Aluminum and Combined Communications Corp., owner of The Tribune – in January pledged $1 million toward a City Center hotel and convention center?

Shetterly recalled Wilson's speaking out against new environmental controls at a meeting of the Association of Bay Area Governments. "OCED perceived that the Eastbay community, especially Oakland, might lose more economically than it would gain environmentally."

Wilson, said Shetterly, was "very respon-

Jesse Jackson's 'Neutrality' Angers Oakland Candidate

By Pearl Stewart

Jesse Jackson heated up Oakland's mayoral race yesterday when he refused to endorse Wilson Riles Jr., the man who headed Jackson's East Bay presidential campaign.

Jackson, who insisted he is remaining neutral in the race between Riles and incumbent Mayor Lionel Wilson, was the guest of honor at a $500-a-plate breakfast hosted by the mayor to help Jackson offset a $700,000 campaign debt.

Riles picked Jackson up at the airport and accompanied him in a car to Gallagher's restaurant for the mayor's breakfast, but he did not go inside, saying he was not invited.

Wilson said he sent word to Riles that "he was welcome if he contributed the $500."

A visibly angry Riles, saying that he had expected a Jackson endorsement, denounced Jackson's neutrality as a "betrayal." Standing briefly outside the restaurant, Riles said, "He's not being neutral at all, his association with the mayor here proves that."

Inside, Jackson said, "I have no plans to endorse anyone in this election. I have great respect for the mayor and I have great respect for Brother Riles."

He later added that he "had worked with" Riles in the past, but he did not acknowledge Riles' role as chairman of his East Bay campaign.

Riles, an Oakland city councilman, accused Wilson of "buying out" Jackson, and said Jackson "ought to have the guts to get out there and support the people who busted their butts for him during his campaign."

Jackson swept the Eighth Congressional District in the primary, earning all six delegates and the two alternates to the convention.

Riles said that he asked Jackson for his endorsement en route from the airport yesterday. Jackson, he said, insisted on [illegible]

JESSE JACKSON IN OAKLAND
He would not back a backer

either candidate.

"If Jesse expects to have a political future in this country, he has to be as upstanding and principled about the people who support him as he is about national and international issues," he said.

Throughout the morning, Jackson's appearances, to raise money for his campaign debt while urging an end to the apartheid policies in South Africa, were complicated by the mayor's race.

Jackson and Riles met up again at an anti-apartheid demonstration of about 100 people outside the offices of the Pacific Maritime Association, which represents shipping firms, including some that carry cargo to and from South Africa.

The demonstrators were largely Riles campaign workers — and Jackson supporters. Riles at first refused to join the group of speakers, which included Jackson, and remained on the sidelines throughout most of the demonstration.

Finally, after Jackson delivered a characteristically fiery attack against South Africa and the U.S. government, Riles joined the circle of speakers — but only after being repeatedly beckoned.

In speeches to the crowd, Riles and Jackson put aside any personal differences and urged the demonstrators to stage "tea parties," by blocking the unloading of ships carrying cargo from South Africa into San Francisco and Oakland ports.

Riles has introduced a resolution to the City Council urging the Port of Oakland to reject cargo from South Africa.

Appendix G
San Francisco Chronicle
December 14, 1984

Oakland mayor's anti-drug plan

By Carla Marinucci
Examiner staff writer

OAKLAND — Conceding that his city is besieged by "open warfare" among rival drug gangs, Mayor Lionel Wilson says his top priority is developing jobs and educational programs to steer Oakland youths away from drugs.

The "pervasive" drug problem here is not unique, the mayor said in an interview with The Examiner, but "what has really brought the focus on Oakland is the killing."

In the past two years, 59 people have been shot to death in drug-related incidents in Oakland.

"Fortunately," Wilson said, "they're using their guns on themselves more than (on) anyone else ...

"Our major challenge in 1985 is to make a greater impact on unemployment, particularly unemployed minority youths, providing them with ways to make a living and educate themselves.

"We must find ways to do something positive with these young people, keeping (them) in school as long as we can."

A major part of last month's four-part Examiner series on the Oakland drug wars described how drug money lures children, some still in grade school, into working for gangs that sell heroin, cocaine and marijuana on street corners.

Wilson said he believes complex social problems — including poverty, unemployment and poor education — encourage hundreds of the city's youths to become lookouts, warning older dealers of the police, and to become street dealers and suppliers themselves when they are older.

As one solution, Wilson cited new state-financed drug education classes scheduled to begin in February in Oakland elementary and secondary schools.

He said he supports continued efforts "to put whatever resources we can muster into educating parents, so they know how to approach the counseling of their children, so they know what to look for."

The mayor said he will work closely with the city's Private Industry Council next year to encourage local business to hire young people.

But because unemployment is "a regional problem," the city must work with surrounding surburbs to find jobs for Oakland residents, Wilson said.

As an example, Wilson cited his work with the Harbor Bay Isle Business Park in Alameda.

"In return for our attempts to assist them with development," he said, "they will try to assist in opening up jobs for our young people."

Even with the jobs, he said, 'it's very tough to convince a 14-year-old

—See Page B5, col. 1

Appendix H
San Francisco Examiner
December 30, 1984

Wilson lauds citizens in anti-drug war

—From Page B1

who's making $500 a week as a drug lookout to take $150-a-week employment."

"The strongest incentives" to keep young people away from drug dealing, Wilson said, are police sweeps, already in effect, cracking down on street dealers and the arrests of suspected major dealers, such as Mickey Moore, taken into federal custody earlier this month.

Many young people now involved in drugs "were born into violence during the days of activism" of the 1960's, Wilson said.

"They saw this type of activity, and they were raised around it," he said.

"It was different (in the '60s) because you didn't have this open warfare going."

What must be pursued now, the mayor said, is "a tough law enforcement program that will show (drug dealing) is a losing game."

"Significant progress" in the fight against drugs has already been made on the judicial and law enforcement fronts, Wilson said.

The mayor also credited ordinary citizens.

"The majority of the people are feeling good about the city," he said. "They're getting involved in the fight."

Residents all over the city have become "more aroused, more courageous" about informing the Police Department about drug dealers, Wilson said.

And that, he said, has led to increased arrests of drug dealers.

A special 10-member police anti-drug unit made more than 100 arrests and confiscated more than 350 bags of heroin, cocaine and marijuana in two weeks after its formation early this month, according to police.

Wilson said the unit has been a highly successful "crash program ... to hit the areas where there was greater evidence of open peddling."

Judges have begun "understanding the problem we have," he said, and are starting to give tougher sentences to drug dealers.

He said Alameda County District Attorney John Meehan's "no plea-bargain" policy in drug-dealing cases was another major step forward.

He said Oakland must continue to "substantially strengthen our neighborhoods" and provide assistance for small-businesspeople, especially in areas such as Elmhusrt that have been plagued by drug dealers.

"Strengthening the businesses helps strengthen the residents," Wilson said.

Wilson is running for a third term as mayor. He is opposed in the April election by City Councilman Wilson Riles Jr.

In response to campaign charges, Wilson said he has been a vigilant fighter against Oakland's drug problems for years.

He said Riles had "politicized the issue."

"The drug problem is a community problem," Wilson said.

He said Police Chief Charles Hart, also criticized by Riles, is "doing the very best job he can, being as creative as possible and using the resources within the department as effectively as he possibly can."

Community involvement against drugs is crucial, Wilson said.

Oakland's drug wars

The problem

There's a drug-related murder in Oakland every two weeks on average — 59 in the past two years. The city's retail drug business is worth an estimated quarter of a billion dollars a year. There is open drug dealing on nearly three dozen street corners. Only about 1 in every 84 Oakland drug arrests results in a state prison sentence.

The promises

"We have an obligation to our city to marshal every resource available (to fight drugs). We (must) prevent drug trafficking from taking over our street corners and putting our neighborhoods in fear."

— Mayor Lionel Wilson, Sept. 20, 1984

The progress

Dec. 3: A $15,000, consultant's report discussing the city's drug problem is released.

The same day: The mayor's 13-member task force, composed of local, state and federal officials, met in closed session for five hours. No specific plan of attack was announced. The next meeting is Jan. 28.

Dec. 6: U.S. Attorney Joseph Russoniello and Alameda County District Attorney John Meehan agree to join forces through a program in which local district attorneys can be deputized as special federal prosecutors and thus steer important drug cases into federal court.

Dec. 9: Rep. Pete Stark, D-Oakland, announces that as soon as Congress reconvenes in January, he will bring the congressional Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control to Oakland for hearings on the city's drug-gang "crisis."

Dec. 10: Milton "Mickey" Moore, suspected ringleader of the Family drug gang, is arrested at his Oakland home with $100,000 worth of heroin and cocaine, a rifle equipped with a silencer and a bulletproof vest. The police turn him over to federal authorities for prosecution.

Dec. 12: A newly formed police task force begins a daily program of sweeping drug "hot spots" to roust street-corner dealers. Police arrest 18 dealers in the first day.

Dec. 18: Assemblyman Elihu Harris, D-Oakland, says he will push legislation to create a "Targeted Urban Crime Narcotics Task Force," with a two-year budget of $4 million, to speed the prosecution of drug dealers.

EXPRESS

The East Bay's Free Weekly ■ January 23, 1987 ■ Volume 9, No. 13

By Alex Laurant

THE ASSAULT ON PAX WILSONIA

In the ten years since he was elected Oakland's first black mayor, Lionel Wilson has quietly dominated Oakland's sleepy political arena. But today, under mounting criticism from both grassroots Democrats and corporate Republicans, there are strong signs that the mayor's grip is slipping.

By Mike McGrath

Last April, Oakland Mayor Lionel Wilson stumbled during a City Council meeting, pitched forward onto the floor, and had to be carried out of the council chambers on a stretcher. Protesting all the while that he was fine, the mayor was loaded onto an ambulance and taken to Kaiser Hospital, where he spent the night in the intensive care unit. Over the next few days, Wilson's staff dismissed any suggestion of serious health problems, explaining that his fall had probably been caused by a mild overdose of bursitis medication. Two weeks later, however, reporters were again calling the mayor's office, this time checking on rumors that Wilson had been admitted to a nearby hospital. "How ridiculous," said the mayor's chief of staff. "It's absolutely not true. He's on vacation."

For an important elected official to collapse during a public meeting, and to virtually drop out of sight for a couple of weeks, is unusual enough, but the fact of the matter was that the mayor *had* been admitted to Seton Hospital in Daly City—to have an elective double bypass operation—and hadn't notified either the City Council or the press because he wanted a few days of privacy. Such privacy may not be an unreasonable desire for a shoe salesman or a PG&E technician, but the mayor of a major American city does not normally expect to be able to have clandestine coronary surgery—unless he happens to be the mayor of Oakland.

Oakland's reputation for political sleepiness is not new, of course. For years, Republican city father types held power over this integrated and politically liberal city only because of widespread apathy and low voter turnouts. With Lionel Wilson's election ten years ago, however, expectations were that all of that would change. The expectations were wrong. What the last decade has proved is that Oakland can have a black Democratic mayor and still have wide-

WILSON

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For some reason, local politics has never developed much of a following in Oakland. More than one organizer has looked at the city's demographics, noted the number of very serious urban problems—crime, unemployment, and neighborhood deterioration—and concluded that it should be a fertile seedbed for political action. More than one organizer has tried, failed, and given up, concluding that Oakland is some sort of mystifying vacuum when it comes to politics.

Every now and then a neighborhood preservation association or a community agency will pack a City Council meeting, but ordinarily you can rest assured of finding a seat in the 252-seat council chambers, with considerable elbow room to spare. During the last mayoral election, in April, 1985, only 23 percent of registered voters came out to the polls, less than half the number who voted in November, 1986.

Mayor Wilson, who was reelected to a third term, interpreted this low turnout as a sign of satisfaction with his performance in office—and in a way, he's right: If there is one area in which Wilson can be seen has having had extraordinary political success, it's in ensuring an atmosphere of stolid moderation in a city that routinely elects the most liberal representative in Congress and the most liberal members of the state Assembly. Neither a particularly exciting speaker nor much of a diplomat, Wilson nonetheless has been able to exercise considerable power in less visible ways, through endorsements and fundraising. In direct conflicts between Wilson and the more liberal "Dellums" wing of the Democratic Party, the mayor has come off the winner more often than not, blocking rent control, for instance, and preventing candidates supported by the congressman from winning seats on the City Council and the county Board of Supervisors.

Wilson has generally won these fights with the support of the conservative hills vote, moderate Democrats, and generous campaign contributions from real estate and business interests. In political circles, people often draw a distinction between the "North County" progressives (Congressman Ron Dellums, Assemblyman Tom Bates, and Supervisor John George) and the "South County" moderates (State Senator Bill Lockyer, Supervisor Bob Knox, and whoever the chairman of the county Democratic Party Central Committee happens to be). Like Oakland itself, Lionel Wilson is smack dab in the middle of this north-south split, and more often than not, he has helped tip the balance from north to south and from left to center.

Once there was talk about a "Dellums, Bates, George machine," but it's interesting to note that the progressives have not been able to make a single important inroad into Oakland politics since 1979. This is in no small part due to the moderating influence of Lionel Wilson.

It was in 1973 that Bobby Seale's surprisingly strong showing in a mayoral primary alerted Democrats to the potential of running a black Democrat for mayor—although they hoped to find one a bit more in the mainstream than a Black Panther member. A superior court judge who had once run the city's anti-poverty program, Lionel Wilson was the choice.

Born in New Orleans but raised in West Oakland, Wilson attended UC Berkeley as an undergraduate and received his law degree from Hastings in San Francisco. Always a strong supporter of civil rights, Wilson has personally suffered from racial discrimination. During the '40s, he scored high on the civil service exams, but was refused a postal service job. Later he played semi-pro baseball and did well enough to make the Bay Area All Star team; every member of that All Star team went on to the majors except Wilson and one other black player.

It's a historical irony—one that veteran Oakland political reporters seldom tire of pointing out—that Wilson's 1977 campaign was greatly helped by organizers from the Black Panther Party (the irony being, of course, that Wilson has proved to be such a conservative mayor). His victory sparked widespread euphoria among white liberals, some of whom predicted the rise of a powerful new coalition of minorities, women, labor, environmentalists, and other progressive groups—and indeed with Wilson Riles Jr.'s election to the City Council in 1979, Ron Dellums in the House of Representatives, Tom Bates in the state Assembly, and John George on the Board of Supervisors, the progressives seemed to be gaining momentum. At one time, there was even talk of a "Dellums, Bates, George" machine. It's interesting to note, however, that the progressives have been unable to make a single important inroad in Oakland since the 1979 election; this is in no small part due to Lionel Wilson's moderating influence.

The 1979 election marked the original break between the progressives and Wilson. The mayor supported Wilson Riles, but opposed a white progressive named Marie Converse, who was, in turn, beaten by a white moderate Democrat, Marge Gibson. That North Oakland seat, in what should be a progressive stronghold, has been a continual source of frustration for the Dellums Democrats—especially since the 1980 passage of a district elections initiative. After the council went to district elections, the progressives ran a black candidate, Cassie Lopez, against Gibson and lost again. In 1983 two more black candidates were elected to the City Council: Leo Bazile, an attorney, whose district is in East Oakland, and, in West Oakland, Aleta Cannon, an administrative assistant to Assemblyman Elihu Harris. This brought the number of blacks on the council to five—all of them Wilson allies, with the exception of Riles.

In 1980, Wilson began to show a more conservative streak when he successfully led the campaign against an initiative strong rent control. On most social sues, Wilson is a moderate liberal, but certain areas, particularly where th has been a conflict between environm talists and developers, Wilson is cons erably to the right of Dellums, Bates, a George ("Have you ever heard of a p environmentalist?" he once retorted). a mayor, Wilson has always believed the link between development and jo "I think to a certain extent, the may personally believes that what is good developers is good for Oakland," sa Wilson Riles, Jr., who ran against t mayor in the 1985 election. Some crit have argued that after taking office, W son simply adopted the platform of 1977 Republican opponent, Dave Tuc er, taking a "business as usual" approa and establishing downtown developme and "revitalization" as the main order business. In the 1985 race, the m substantive criticism made by Riles w that the mayor had emphasized dow town development at the expense neighborhood revitalization. But the sue never caught fire, and Riles's und financed campaign never went a where. The mayor won with sixty p cent of the vote.

If East Bay liberals proved to b quite wrong in their original op mism about the effects of Wilson election on local politics, some other o servers were much more prescient. Soo after Wilson's election in 1977, Pa Cobb, then director of a group calle Oakland Citizens Committee for Urba Renewal, had predicted that a natural a liance between "minorities and industry would come out of the Wilson electio and he was close to the mark. In his se ond campaign, Wilson was supported b the same downtown business figure who had supported Dave Tucker fou years earlier. The reservations th business establishment had had abou Wilson were apparently forgotten.

The "natural alliance" between Wilso and Oakland's business establishmen was strengthened still further by th mayor's high-profile opposition to Oak land's rent control proposition. Fron 1980 on, campaign contributions fron property managers, landlords, realtors and developers began to flow more freel into the "Mayor's Fund for Oakland."

As smooth as the transition seemed t be, however, there is an important di ference between Wilson and the ol downtown establishment and it lies in th obvious question of race. A new capitalis form of black power came into being i Oakland along with the Wilson admini stration, and its battle cry and chief de

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mand was "minority equity."

As a slogan, minority equity is less bold and threatening than "black power," but as an official policy, it is a fairly radical idea, one that stems from an even more radical economic disparity. If you compare the average annual income of blacks to whites, there is a definite imbalance, but if you compare financial assets, the differential is much more pronounced. According to the US Census Bureau, the typical black family in America has a net worth of $3,397, less than one-tenth the net worth of the average white family. Minority equity is aimed at giving minorities a piece of the action by forcing developers to have minority partners in multi-million dollar projects. Unfortunately, such a policy immediately faces one practical obstacle: there are very few black investors who have that kind of money to invest. Consequently, it is frequently the same small number of black investors—who, in Oakland's case, are frequently friends and supporters of the mayor—that get top consideration from the city in development deals. A white city councilmember once complained that the goal of local government should not be to create black millionaires. Nonetheless, increasing black wealth has clearly been a goal in the Wilson administration.

By trying to use political power to achieve economic power, the Wilsonians are, of course, following a well-established American tradition among poor and disenfranchised ethnic groups. It is possible to push the analogy too far, but Oakland blacks, like the 19th century Irish in New York and Boston, are by and large first or second generation immigrants from backward rural areas, who arrived (or whose parents arrived) in the big city and were immediately at a relative disadvantage in terms of education, job skills, and financial resources to the earlier, assimilated immigrants. And obviously Oakland blacks were at a much greater disadvantage than the Irish because of the much higher level of racial resistance.

In addition to racism, however, there was also a big problem of timing. Charter reform, civil service standards, and, most of all, general economic decline have made city politics less lucrative than in the past. These days most city politicians have to work as lawyers, administrative assistants to other politicians, or employees of private or public interest groups. A city councilmember rarely strikes it rich. There are certain perks that go with the office—season tickets to the A's, memberships in health clubs, travel opportunities, and the ability to hobnob with influential people. But the political campaigning that's required to hold on to these perks is becoming increasingly expensive. The tab can easily run as high as $50,000 for a closely contested race. For candidates who are not personally wealthy, that money has to come from somewhere.

In most cities, the potential donors with the biggest pocketbooks are generally related to real estate and land development interests. In Oakland there are two major developments worthy of note, the Chinatown Redevelopment Project and the City Retail Center, a major shopping district which city planners hope to establish downtown near the spacious old department store, Emporium Capwell's. In the fall of 1985, a host of development firms, mostly from outside the Bay Area, were competing for city contracts to undertake these projects. It wasn't surprising when generous donations from some of the bidders began to show up in the campaign disclosure statements of city elected officials.

What was more disconcerting, however, were indications that some elected officials were aggressively courting contributions, holding fundraising dinners before deciding on important council issues and taking in large sums from interested parties. Councilmember Aleta Cannon, for example, raised $15,000 at a fundraising dinner at Gallagher's Restaurant in October, about a month before the Council vote on the Chinatown Redevelopment Project, and received $4,250 from two development teams competing for the project.

"My mind was made up [about the Chinatown project] long before any of those contributions were made," says Cannon, who says she likes to have her campaign fundraisers during non-election years for reasons of simple practicality. "If you wait until election year, then all the candidates are [fundraising] at once, and everybody is asking for contributions from the same people. My concern is with the skyrocketing cost of campaigns. I don't think the contributions my colleagues receive have any effect on their votes. I know it doesn't affect my vote."

Mayor Wilson, who was reelected in April of '85, held a fundraiser in December of 1985, a month before the council voted on the downtown retail center, explaining later to inquiring *Tribune* reporter Kathy Zimmerman that he intended to donate the money to the statewide Democratic Party's races in 1986, the 1987 council races, and the presidential race in 1988. As Zimmerman reported, during the six months covered in the mayor's January 1986 financial disclosure statement, the mayor received $17,000 in contributions from the development teams who were interested in the retail center and Chinatown redevelopment projects. "I wasn't aware that it was that much money," he told the reporter. "I don't go over the contributions because I don't want to know who contributed or how much it was. A contribution to my campaign doesn't mean it in any way influences my vote."

A quick analysis of the contributions gives some support to the mayor's contention. Although the winning team in the shopping center project, the Rouse Company of Maryland, gave Wilson's fund $4,500, one of the losing teams gave him even more, nearly $4,800. On the other hand, the winning development team in the Chinatown project had given the mayor about $6,000 while the losing team had given him nothing at all. It's impossible to prove that this or that contribution influenced this or that vote, but there is a growing concern that the sheer size of the contributions by special interests is corrupting the system. "There is more money in local campaigns," says Wilson Riles, Jr., who's up for reelection in April, "and the amount of money coming from developers is growing. It's starting to appear that you can't win a campaign unless you have big money, and you can't get big money unless you get it from real estate."

"It gets to be a situation of continual fundraising," says Mary Moore, the councilmember from the Lake Merritt area. "Fundraising whenever there is an excuse. And then you're into a mode like Sacramento and Washington of permanent fundraising so you have a permanent war chest."

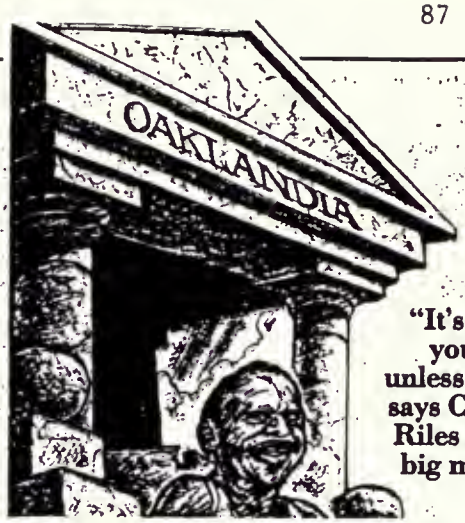
Most large California cities, including Los Angeles and San Francisco, have adopted local regulations to limit the size of campaign contributions and discourage the possibility of vote buying or influence peddling. For quite some time, the League of Women Voters and others have talked about pushing for campaign reforms in Oakland, but until recently

nothing was actually done. The revelations about developer contributions in early 1986, however, gave a new sense of urgency to those who supported reforms. In late December, when three Oakland councilmembers announced that they had drafted two sweeping reform ordinances and would push to have them included on the April ballot, political observers were interested. The three councilmembers included two liberal Democrats, Riles and Moore—and the council's last remaining white Republican, Dick Spees.

If you were asked to imagine the sort of person who would go on a crusade against the influence of big money in local politics, Dick Spees might not make your short list. A senior executive with the Kaiser Aluminum and Chemical Corporation, Spees serves as treasurer of the political action committee for the California Manufacturers Association. He knows how to raise money. After the Democrats won control of Oakland city government in the late '70s and early '80s, Spees and Frank Ogawa were the only two Republicans remaining on the City Council. Spees, however, is quite a bit more liberal than the average Republican—an "Oregonian Republican," he calls himself. He has been more "liberal" than the mayor, particularly on environmental and neighborhood issues. On the Oakland council, though, questions of party or ideology have come to be less significant than questions of loyalty.

For about two months, the three councilmembers worked quietly with the city attorney's office to draft sweeping new reform measures. A Municipal Campaign Contributions Act would undercut the flow of political contributions by putting a $500 limit on individual (and corporate) contributions to any Oakland elected official. Just as significantly, it would impose a $500 cap on the amount of money that could be transferred from one campaign fund to another. It would also ensure that campaign committees would file up-to-date disclosure statements on the Monday before any given election. (Often candidates file late campaign disclosures, so some of the contributors can't be identified by the public until after the election.) Meanwhile a separate Municipal Lobbyist and Conflict of Interest Act would force lobbyists to register with the city and file quarterly disclosures with the city, listing amounts given to city officials. It would prevent lobbyists and their employers from making campaign contributions within sixty days of an election, and it would prevent city officials from accepting contributions from lobbyists while a "proceeding involving a license, permit, or entitlement is pending and for three months preceding the decision."

Armed with this shiny new reform package, Riles, Spees, and Moore began the fight to put it on the April ballot. The showdown would come in the City Council chambers.



"It's starting to appear like you can't win a campaign unless you have big money," says Councilmember Wilson Riles Jr., "and you can't get big money unless you get it from real estate."

An unusually large crowd of spectators was in attendance when the January 6 meeting of the Oakland City Council was called to order. Though most of these onlookers were there to protest a proposed tough new animal control ordinance, they soon found themselves watching a brief but vitriolic procedural fight between Spees, Riles, and Moore and the rest of the council.

When the three councilmembers had introduced their reform measures, the mayor had reacted angrily, saying it was unreasonable to try to put the ordinances on the April ballot. Since he had to be away on business on January 6, he gave the gavel to one of his staunchest loyalists, Frank Ogawa. The mayor's instructions were quite clear.

"This item is on the agenda with no discussion prior to this evening," Ogawa complained. "To have this kind of ordinance come before us at the last minute is unfair to the other members of the council." Ogawa went on to read a letter from the mayor, in which Spees, Riles, and Moore were accused of preparing the ordinances in secret. (In fact Spees had sent the mayor a draft of the ordinances on December 19, but the other councilmembers had not seen them until later.) Wilson's letter contended that there was not adequate time for the council to consider the ordinances before the deadline for putting new measures on the April ballot, January 15. "Is there significant evidence that council members have succumbed to financial interests in voting on issues," asked the mayor's letter, "or is this more of another [sic] political smokescreen based upon personal interests and/or ambitions?" This last innuendo appeared to be aimed at Dick Spees, a possible, although undeclared, candidate for the 1989 mayor's race.

Bitter exchanges are not uncommon during Oakland City Council meetings, but the organized dissident front that persistently argued its case that night was somewhat unusual. With at least a five-member majority on nearly every issue, Wilson has been very effective at keeping the lid on council meetings, and ordinarily when the dissidents are on the losing end they quietly abstain or vote "no." Ogawa moved swiftly to put an end to this peculiar situation and squelched further debate by referring the ordinances to the "rules and procedures" committee of the council. Ordinarily, as Spees angrily pointed out, new ordinances would go to the legislative committee. By referring it to the rules and procedures committee, which consists of Wilson and three of his strongest supporters—Carter Gilmore, Leo Bazile, and Aleta Cannon—Ogawa had ensured that the measure would not be considered before the January 15 deadline. Ogawa said later that the way the ordinance had been introduced was "very improper," and that was why he sent it to rules and procedures with a one-vote council majority.

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WILSON

continued from page 11

"Just imagine if a corporation tried to do something without the knowledge of the chairman or the board of directors,"' he said.

Dick Spees' office is on the 22nd floor of the Kaiser Building. It's a grand suite with a towering view of the smoggy lowlands of downtown Oakland, and could symbolize the time before Wilson was elected, when Kaiser, Clorox, and the Knowland-owned *Oakland Tribune* exercised a form of power that was even more direct than the influence of big developer money in elections. Some political observers, in fact, view the increase in political contributions from developers as a welcome sign of pluralism, or at least a decentralization of power. But there is also a sense that with the escalation of campaign costs, both at the state and local level, a lot of businessmen are simply sick and tired of being hit up for money by the politicians. "It's absolutely gross," said Spees. "Sitting on my desk right now are about four letters from assemblymen who have hit me up in the past five days. Every day they have fundraisers. They're creating bills up there that are called 'juice bills,' that they can raise money around. They raise these large sums of money and move it around from one campaign to another. The milk of politics is money.

"There is always a strong temptation, when you have big developers doing things, to view the city opportunistically, and I think it's really important for Oakland to maintain a really squeaky clean political environment. One fear is that Oakland will get the reputation of being for hire and, when developers come into the city, that folks are all over them like locusts, saying, 'I know how to get you five votes on the City Council.' We don't want to have that kind of reputation. Good developers don't want that. They don't want to get involved in that kind of system. We want to have the reputation of being an open and clean city. Oakland has always been a clean city.

"There is also a concern that the system is skewed in favor of incumbents because of the cost of campaigns, and in order to preserve democracy at the local level, I firmly believe there has to be some kind of limits."

In the letter that Frank Ogawa read to the City Council, Mayor Wilson posed an interesting question: Would, as he put it, "a flat cap on campaign contributions impact unfairly upon minority candidates, who, in an Oakland citywide election, would not have the same access to large numbers of corporate or business contributors as a candidate who comes out of the business or corporate community?" Spees argues that this is total nonsense. "I have the most to lose," he says, "because I'm a very good fundraiser. I'm treasurer of the state PAC for the CMA and I'm very familiar with this stuff. I'm willing to put myself under this because I believe passionately that we need restraint." Logically, it would seem that a member of the "corporate community" would be more able to raise money in large chunks, for there are only so many large corporations like Kaiser and Clorox. Some observers, in fact, believe that the cap might strengthen the hand of lobbyists, who would be more skillful at lining up large numbers of small contributions. The other ordinance, however, would restrict the activities of lobbyists, so on the balance, they would probably stand to lose influence if both measures were ever implemented.

From a political standpoint, however, the most significant reform might not be the cap on individual contributions, but the $500 limitation on transfers from one campaign chest to another. Every now and then, a developer may fly into Oakland and drop $1,500 into the mayor's campaign chest, but that contribution is there for anyone to see in the mayor's campaign disclosure statement and, since the mayor's vote is recorded by the City Clerk, connections are fairly easy to discern. It's in the shifting alliances of city, county, and state politicians, all having access to different sources of funding, that the picture of political contributions and political influence becomes more complicated. As it now stands, money can circulate quite freely between the campaign committees of state, county, and local elected officials. Elihu Harris, for example, contributed $2,500 to his administrative assistant, Councilmember Aleta Cannon, in September of 1985; she, in turn, loaned $15,000 to the effort to elect Don Perata to the Alameda-East Oakland seat on the county Board of Supervisors. Cannon also lent $5,000 to last November's campaign to pass the county transportation sales tax, Measure B.

With money passing from one campaign chest to another, tracing any evidence of undue possible influence to an original source becomes that much more difficult. A state legislator who has access to huge amounts of money from state PACs and lobbyists may donate funds to a city councilmember who then may donate it to some other candidate, leading to a situation where money from, say, the State Association of Licensed Repossessors is helping to pay for campaign mailers in an East Oakland school board race. Undoubtedly, there would be no direct influence on the school board by the State Association of Repossessors. The money would no longer be serving its original purpose, and would now have become part of an unspecified political pool, making the question of influence a matter between politicians.

When the Democrats won a majority on the Oakland City Council, there was, for the first time in decades, a network of like-minded politicians operating at the state, county, and local level. Historically, California has had a very weak party structure, and as a result, efforts to develop candidates, raise money, and cement alliances have to a great extent fallen on the shoulders of individual elected officials, people like Lionel Wilson, Elihu Harris, and State Senator Bill Lockyer, the most influential of the moderate South County Democrats.

A former county party chairman, Lockyer has been a Democratic activist since he campaigned for Adlai Stevenson as a sixth grader, and he has been described in the press as someone who "lives, breathes, and eats politics." "As a Democrat, it was always frustrating in Oakland," says Lockyer. "You'd have a city that was overwhelmingly Democratic, but it kept electing Republicans. For decades Oakland was dominated by the Knowland business establishment. That changed rather dramatically when Lionel Wilson was elected. I have a feeling there are now multiple competing elites rather than one somewhat united group. What tends to happen is power is more distributed and there is more competition between different perspectives and philosophies and geographical concerns, which would increase the total amount of campaign money in the system. But it might actually reduce the grip of any particular interest, because there would be more cancelling out."

The alliance between city and county Democrats has clearly reduced the influence of corporate Republicans, but it has also reduced the influence of the more leftist, ideological Democrats like Tom Bates and Ron Dellums. Moreover, this alliance has existed despite a very real conflict of interest between a poor, urban district like Oakland and the expanding suburban areas near Pleasanton, Newark, and Fremont. A good example of the conflict was Measure B, the one-half cent sales tax to fund highway improvements, road repairs, and mass transit needs that was easily passed in November. The Measure B Campaign Committee described itself as being "a lot of people sick and tired of sitting in traffic," but a quick once-over of campaign statements indicates that the main contributors were contractors, realtors, leasing agents, lending institutions, home builders, construction product suppliers, and large property owners —the interest group known collectively in Sacramento slang as "the sand and gravel boys." Driving down the Nimitz Freeway south of San Leandro, it's easy to see why these interests were eager to pass the tax; there are huge subdivisions with hundreds of partially constructed homes right next to the I-880 corridor. The traffic jams are bad enough as it is, but once those new townhouse owners start driving to work, the Nimitz could begin to rival the Long Island Expressway.

The possibility of an alliance, no matter how temporary or tacit, between "good government" Republicans and grassroots Democrats to "clean up" Oakland politics is an entirely new political development—and an ominous one for the mayor.

The spending plan for the tax was drafted by a subcommittee appointed by the county supervisors. Last year a small scandal erupted when the *Oakland Tribune* revealed that two members of the subcommittee were employees of two development companies that stood to benefit from the proposed highway improvements: Harbor Bay Isle, near Alameda, and the Hacienda Business Park, near Pleasanton. The original draft of the tax spending plan was heavily weighted toward highway projects that benefited the suburbs and specific developers, and some critics argued that Oakland residents would be spending more in additional taxes than they would be getting back in terms of mass transit or urban street improvements. Eventually, a compromise was worked out that increased the pot for AC Transit and street repair. Although, to be fair, the mayor was not in the best of health at the time, it was Councilmember Mary Moore who pointed out Measure B's negative impact on the urban East Bay, and pushed for a compromise (with the help of Assemblyman Tom Bates). Mayor Wilson and his allies on the council sat the conflict out.

Can one trace the possible influence of the sand and gravel boys on Oakland officials? It isn't quite as simple as it was in the case of the City Retail Center, where it was possible to simply look at the mayor's campaign contributions. In this case it is necessary to look into political alliances. Take Judy Briggs Marsh, for instance. Marsh is the Harbor Bay Isle employee who sat on the transit tax subcommittee. She has also been a fundraiser for Mayor Wilson. Bill Cavala, who lobbied in Sacramento for the state legislation to authorize the county tax, is a former close advisor to the mayor. And Mary King, a campaign consultant for Measure B, has worked at different times for the mayor and the other kingpin in county politics, State Senator Bill Lockyer.

A moderate liberal, who represents the heart of sand and gravel country—Pleasanton, Union City, Newark, San Leandro, Hayward, and a small part of Oakland—Bill Lockyer has helped launch the careers of a number of East Bay politicos, including supervisors Bob Knox and Don Perata, both of whom were strong supporters of the transportation tax.

"This is always a very difficult problem, trying to sort out private goals and the public interest," admits Lockyer. "There are numerous transportation issues that we need to address; the Nimitz, number one, and the BART extension. Now, if in trying to solve those problems in a fair and conscientious way, there happens to be a ripple effect that benefits somebody who wants to develop some land, but can't because of the absence of infrastructure, does that mean you shouldn't try to solve the problem?"

Lockyer's own campaign disclosure statements list a considerable number of contributions from development interests, as well as state PAC money that is related to his activities in Sacramento. From that large pot, Lockyer has, in turn, contributed large sums to other candidates, most notably in the supervisorial elections. "I don't operate from any sort of demonology," says Lockyer. "I guess it's one of those changes that does occur with people. Most of us, while we're first elected in a sort of advocacy perspective, shift to a more meditative one in time. Partly because you meet some very smart people with different philosophies and, if you're a sensitive human being, you can't be quite as certain about the opinions you once held. I'm not sure who's responsible for the social glue, if not us. So you find that there is a need to mediate and harmonize the competing interests and that's a legitimate job. One of the things you have to do is mount campaigns, and so you look around for interests that may be philosophical, or may be self-interested, and you try to marry those particular goals. That's part of the art of this profession."

There is some evidence, however, that the social glue has covered Oakland a little too thickly, and that the alliance which Wilson has helped to cement between state, county, and local politicians with financial support from the sand and gravel boys has had a smothering effect on Oakland politics. On the grassroots level, there has been a growing dissatisfaction with the "Pax Wilsonia" that the mayor has established through his control over the City Council, a growing sense that there has been little improvement over the last ten years in the most serious problems plaguing Oakland: high crime, unemployment, the high cost of housing, and the deterioration of neighborhood business districts. This grassroots dissatisfaction became much more visible (and audible) during the Oakland teachers strike, when it was revealed that the mayor wanted to spend $15 million to bail out the Oakland A's. People were already grumbling about the sums the city expended in its futile effort to keep the Oakland Raiders. More and more letters began to appear in the *Tribune* criticizing these sports expenditures, and councilmembers began to report an unusually large amount of angry mail.

As a further sign of potential dissatisfaction, several promising candidates from the progressive wing of the party have announced they will run in the April election: Ignacio De La Fuente, a union leader who has been instrumental in the fight to keep the Delaval engine plant from closing, is planning to run against Frank Ogawa; Chappell Hayes, a grassroots organizer in West Oakland, is planning to run against Aleta Cannon; and Cassie Lopez is planning to run once again against Marge Gibson in North Oakland. Although these grassroots candidates are clearly the underdogs, the campaign reform issue could have a weakening effect on the firm grip Lionel Wilson has had on the city. (Now that the council majority has refused to put the reform ordinances on the ballot, the next step for Spees, Riles, and Moore might be a signature drive to put the ordinances on the next ballot, or perhaps even to hold a special election.) The possibility of an alliance—no matter how temporary or tacit—between "good government" Republicans and grassroots Democrats to "clean up" Oakland politics is an entirely new political development—and an ominous one for the mayor.

The question of campaign reform meanwhile, could well have a significant impact on the 1989 mayor's race. Wilson has said that he plans to run for a fourth term, but some observers wonder whether his health will allow it. Others mentioned as possible candidates are Carter Gilmore, Leo Bazile, Assemblyman Elihu Harris, Port Commissioner William Hunter (all Wilson supporters) Wilson Riles, Jr., and of course Dick Spees. As it stands now, should Wilson decide to step down, he could easily run his campaign fund up into the six figure range—in the last election he raised about $350,000—and hand it over to a favored candidate. If so, he could be in a position of virtually naming his successor, most likely a moderately liberal black Democrat with the mayor's views on city government and with his ties to the county party establishment. But if the campaign reforms ever become law, the mayor would be able to give away only $500 from his fund, which could mean a more competitive election and a more spirited debate of the issues in 1989. And, perhaps, an end to the yawning vacuum that has been Oakland politics.

San Francisco Examiner

Oakland Mayor *Lionel Wilson seated in front of the Interfaith Choir at a memorial for victims of the Oct. 17 earthquake.*

Like the city he governs, Oakland Mayor Lionel Wilson suffers from a tarnished image. But he stands by his controversial record.

Photographs by Fran Ortiz

IMAGE PROFILE

A SHOW

"I've known Lionel all my California adult life, and he has always been for me the image and symbol of how I would like to have people respect me. He was intellectually superior, he was absolutely firm in his conviction, he was principled frankly to a fault. He was devoid of any of the obvious trappings of most politicians."

Assembly Speaker Willie Brown on Lionel Wilson.

Lionel Wilson knows all about images: his own, his city's, the images of his past.

He acknowledges that, to many, he is the mayor of a poor city plagued by a monumental drug problem, a leader who can't lead effectively. But Wilson is not haunted by those images. "I just feel that I have a job to do and I try to do it. I try to deal with the problems and issues and move on.... There are many things I've done that because of my style and because of the lack of a press officer haven't come to the attention of a lot of people."

He bristles at the contention that he has shown a lack of leadership. "Now, I wonder what they call leadership when for over 12 years, working with a council which contains some very independent people, I've hardly lost any major issue. And you have to remember I have no powers as mayor over the council, I have no veto over legislation passed by the council."

Wilson notes that during his reign as mayor, the city's tax base has more than tripled as new businesses have moved in and the Port of Oakland has advanced into the forefront of busy ports around the nation. He notes that Oakland's first new hotel in three decades — the Hyatt Regency — was built during his administration.

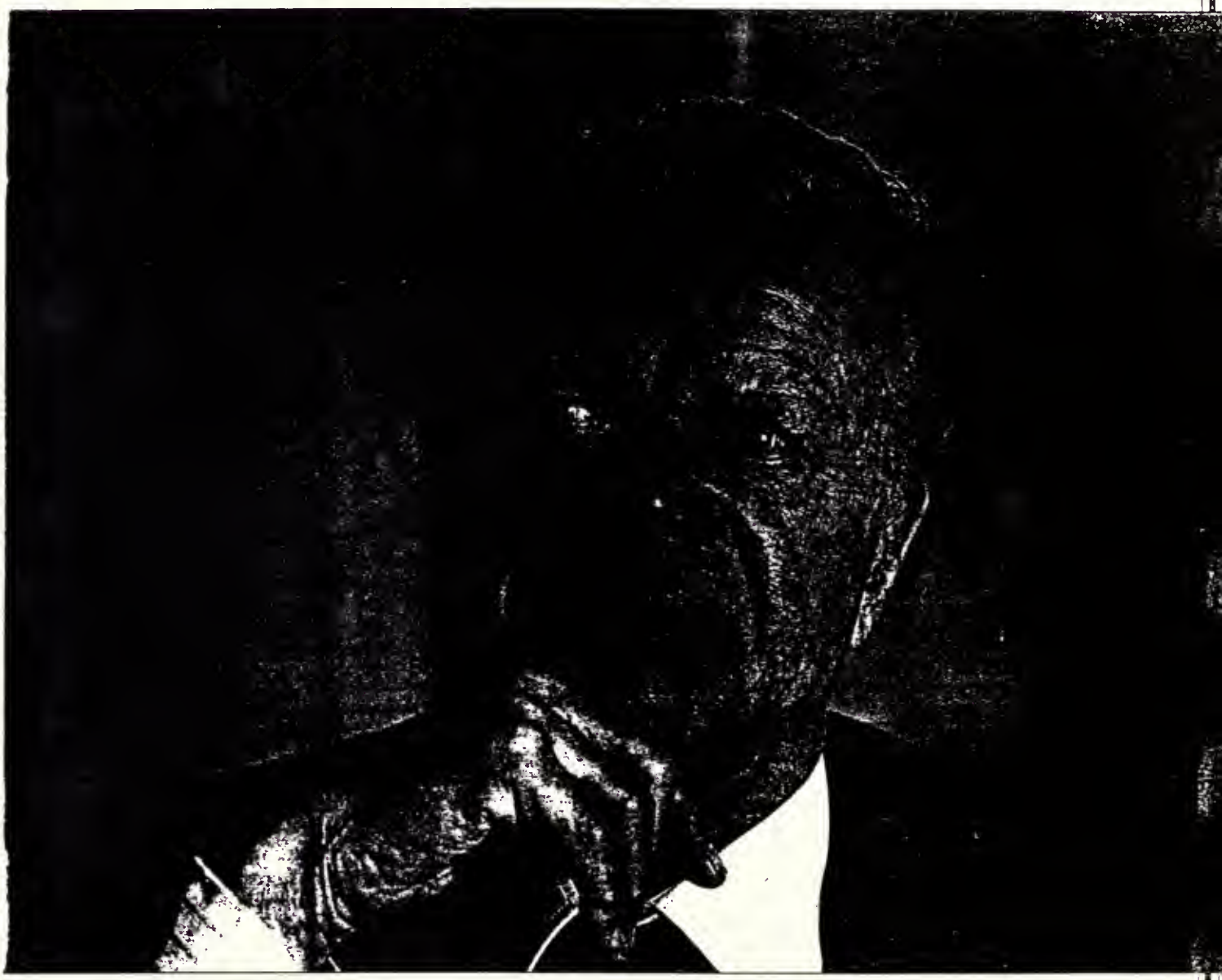
And more recently, he lured the University of California headquarters to Oakland and beat out San Francisco, among other cities, in landing a 4,500-employee federal office complex. He helped resolve a long and bitter dispute among warring factions of the Oakland Museum and guided the city through a devastating earthquake.

Wilson's success is directly linked to his talent for confronting problems and presenting solutions in one-on-one meetings, whether he's trying to convince university or federal officials that Oakland is the place for them, or whether he's mediating a conflict. His hole card is the promise of stable leadership and council support he's been able to deliver for more than a decade.

Wilson is most often criticized for catering to downtown business interests at the expense of the city's neigh-

OF PRIDE

By Charles C. Hardy



borhoods. The city's record-breaking murder rate, its school system that ranks among the worst in the state and its high rates of poverty and unemployment are just some of the ills for which his detractors say he is at least partly responsible.

His support of the controversial billion-dollar proposal to bring back the Raiders football team and of the earlier fruitless $9 million legal effort to force their return are seen as evidence of inept leadership.

"I think Lionel Wilson is a tragic figure," says Barry Bloom, a longtime Oakland resident and astute political observer. "He was cast by (former governor) Edmund G. Brown as the pioneer of the race. As best I can tell, he was a decent

judge. I don't believe he has ever had substantial backbone. I think if (former Black Panther) Bobby Seale had not run so well (four years earlier) against (white Republican Mayor) John Redding that Lionel Wilson never would have tried it.

"I think in the big picture that Lionel Wilson is indistinguishable from Coleman Young, Carl Stokes and a whole number of moderate black civil rights leaders who took over American cities. All of them without exception, (L.A. Mayor) Tom Bradley included, bought into the specious notion that downtown development and wooing corporations and sports teams would save their cities. That strategy has failed in our society black-dominated cities have those kinds of characteristics magnified because they're really misunderstood. I don't think the drug conditions are nearly as pervasive in Oakland as they are in Los Angeles, but Los Angeles is not a black-dominated city."

Brown says Wilson has taken Oakland to the precipice of greatness. "When you compare Oakland with cities of comparable levels of population and income you find that Oakland is head and shoulders above them, all over America. Oakland is, should be and will be the center of economic development in Northern California, at least for the Bay Area.... Lionel's legacy will be that he put the infrastructure in place that will ultimately allow Oakland to reach the pinnacle of success."

In fact, says Brown, the real problems with Oakland are that "it suffers from this image thing and there is not enough new capital.

"You have to understand that Oakland is like a child going through teen-age growth problems that teen-agers go through; it is becoming racially dominated in every respect of decision making by minorities, from the school district level to the City Council, and that sends shock waves throughout the city."

It was widely felt that Wilson, who is 75, would not seek re-election this year and instead would turn the leadership baton over to his 42-year-old protege, Assemblyman Elihu Harris, D-Oakland. But Wilson announced months ago that he would run again, much to the disappointment of Harris and several other candidates for mayor, including council members Leo Bazile and Wilson Riles Jr.

Wilson says the original rumors that he wasn't going to run were accurate, but that plans to bring a huge regional shopping center to downtown Oakland appear to rest on whether he remains in office. "I didn't plan to run again, but the people around this shopping center, the builders, the developers, told me the only way they can get it done is if I'm mayor and the government is stable. That's why I'm running again. Otherwise, I'd rather be doing other things with my time right now."

ELIZABETH MANGELSDORF

and it remains unchallenged in any meaningful way in any minority majority city I know in America."

Still, says Bloom, "I regard Lionel very ambivalently; he is by no means a bad man, but he has made repeated choices that have exacerbated rather than ameliorated Oakland's most serious problems."

Wilson says he is keenly aware of such criticism, but that his strategy of attracting business to the city will increase its tax base and thus provide more services to neighborhoods and more jobs for residents. And Assembly Speaker Willie Brown says that neither the mayor nor the city of Oakland deserve their negative reputations.

"It's a black-dominated city, and

Jules and Louise Wilson moved to Oakland from New Orleans in 1918, at the urging of Louise's brother. Lionel, the oldest of their children, was just 3½.

The Wilsons settled in West Oakland and completed their family of eight, six boys and two girls. Jules Wilson was a plasterer by trade, who like countless others was without work through much of the Great Depression: he later worked as a post office custodian.

A story Lionel Wilson tells about his father's job with the post office

defines to some degree what life was like for blacks in the Bay Area at that time. Jules Wilson had been working as a custodian for years before his supervisors discovered that the light-complected man was actually black. The fact came to their attention only after young Lionel applied for a job at the post office to support himself while he was in college. Lionel Wilson didn't get a job, though some of his white classmates with lower scores on the postal exam did, but Jules Wilson was the real victim.

"My father had been with them for years, but he caught hell in the custodial service of the Oakland post office from then on," says Wilson, whose father died in 1972.

points in the old California Basketball League, the highest level of basketball in the state before the National Basketball Association.

Wilson says it was athletics that set the tone for much of his later success. "I had to utilize every resource I had in developing whatever talent I had. So many of these things that one learns in sports are transferable. It's the same way in dealing with people. One of the things I learned in sports is you don't underestimate anybody in terms of your opponents, and that's something that's very important as far as trying to play a leadership role in the community."

Wilson graduated from Cal with an economics degree in 1939. He

in Alameda County which purportedly would handle problems of this kind, but in the 10 years that I practiced law, I can't tell you how many times I referred people to Legal Aid for one problem or another, and I never had one instance where they accepted or handled the case.

"But there were a few of us, black lawyers, who thought nothing of getting into situations of this kind and fighting them without monetary return," says Wilson. "As a matter of fact, I guess actually we were spending our own money because all a lawyer has is time. I can't tell you how many pro bono cases I handled in those 10 years."

Wilson was also one of the black attorneys who fought to integrate

'Lionel's legacy will be that he put the infrastructure in place that will ultimately allow Oakland to reach the pinnacle of success.'

Wilson and *Alameda County Supervisor Don Perata celebrate approval of the plan to bring back the Raiders, far left; at Cole School on one of his periodic visits to city schools, center; and attending a Mickey Mouse diamond jubilee at Lake Merritt.*

Wilson attended McClymonds High School, which at the time was a predominantly white vocational-oriented school. He graduated with honors and was admitted to UC-Berkeley.

He worked as a redcap at the old Oakland Mole, as a dishwasher at a Lake Merritt area restaurant and as a laborer in the Crockett sugar factory to pay his way through school.

Wilson was slight — about 5-foot-5, maybe 130 pounds — but he was always athletic. In his spare time he played semi-professional baseball and basketball. He was an all-star in a 30-team baseball league and once missed winning the scoring championship by two

knew he wanted to be a lawyer, but World War II curtailed those plans. He spent most of it in the Army, some as a sergeant serving in Europe. In 1945, he was discharged and returned to Oakland.

During his military stint, Wilson had lost his 6-month-old son, Timothy, to illness. But he and his wife would have three other sons, twins Lionel and Robin and their youngest, Stephen.

Wilson graduated from Hastings College of the Law in 1949 and began practicing about a year later.

He remembers being part of a cadre of black lawyers in Oakland who often took cases for a cause rather than a dollar.

"There was a Legal Aid Society

the Oakland Board of Realtors, which until 1965 did not admit blacks, and he worked on other civil rights issues as a local leader of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

In 1960, Gov. Edmund G. (Pat) Brown made history by appointing Wilson to serve on the Oakland-Piedmont Municipal Court, making Wilson the first black judge in Alameda County.

"I learned from some of my friends that the judges in Municipal Court had had a meeting to decide whether they wanted to work with me or something of that nature," says Wilson. "So when I went down there, since I didn't need any

[Continued on page 28]

A show of pride

[Continued from page 7]

of them to do the job I was assigned to do, I stayed away from them. I wouldn't attend their meetings and in a few months they were begging me to join in and become one of them. So in less than three years, the same people who didn't know whether they could accept me on the bench, as they put it, had now elected me as their presiding judge."

Being the "first black" pioneering new grounds, says Wilson, can be either a burden or a challenge, depending on how one approaches it. "It can be a real weight on one's back if you look at it in that way, particularly at the level of judges when most of them had had very little to do with blacks and they don't understand us and they think that we're inferior.

"On the other hand," he says, "my approach has always been to see it as a challenge, an opportunity for me to show them the fact I can do whatever they can do and can be just as effective doing it."

Two examples of the Wilson philosophy in action stand out in the mayor's mind. Both are from the period after he was elevated to Alameda County Superior Court in 1964. One instance occurred when Wilson was presiding judge of Superior Court. It was his responsibility to dole out small-claims assignments to his colleagues as their calendars cleared during the afternoon. But on one particular Friday, all of his colleagues took off early for the weekend and left him with 40 small-claims matters on his desk.

"So, I decided, 'Damn it, I'm going to hear these cases.' I announced in open court that I was alone, I have no help but I want to get to each one of you.... By 4:30 that afternoon I had heard every one of those cases. Of course, I was fortunate in that I can make decisions rapidly, listen carefully to the facts and apply the law and move right on."

When his colleagues returned the next week they were "sheepish, but it taught them something in terms of what I could do, in spite of the fact that I am black, which was something negative to at least many of them."

In another instance, Wilson was successful, despite the earlier failures of others, in getting his Superior Court colleagues to move from a seniority-based system of case and court assignments to one based on merit. It took months of lobbying individual judges.

Wilson proudly believes that his performance in roles traditionally denied blacks helped blaze a trail for others to follow.

"I believe I did open up some doors," he says. "I believe the way I conducted myself — I attempted to be eminently fair and I worked hard so that I made a major point of carrying my share of the load — did help."

"I believe I was the first major candidate elected over an *(Oakland) Tribune* endorsement," says Wilson. "At that time, the paper was very powerful."

When Wilson came into office in 1977 the City Council was predominantly white, as was the city manager, who under the city's charter was the chief administrator of city affairs. Still, Wilson soon found a way to gain influence.

With the help of then City Councilman George Vukasin, now president of the Oakland-Alameda Coliseum Board, Wilson quickly gained a voting consensus on the council. Almost as rapidly he moved into the arena of king-making, mapping out strategies for bringing more minorities onto the decision-making body.

"I supported Wilson Riles Jr., I endorsed him and through a business friend helped raise most of the money for his initial campaign," says Wilson. "And it was my decision years ago, that here we had a City Council, in a city with a population that was about 45 percent

black with two Caucasian women on it and no black women, to find a way to get a black woman on it."

Wilson initiated that agenda by successfully lobbying Gov. Jerry Brown to appoint then at-large Councilman John Sutter to the Superior Court. Despite some resistance, he accomplished that mission and then lobbied the council to get the votes necessary to have Aleta Cannon fill out the rest of Sutter's at-large term. After that term expired, Cannon ran as a West Oakland district representative and won. Meanwhile, veteran Councilman Frank Ogawa attained the lone at-large seat Wilson had pledged he would get.

On a personal level, life presented a greater challenge to Wilson.

After he and his first wife divorced, Wilson married his second wife, Dorothy, an attorney. They live in the Montclair section of Oakland. But some years ago when Dorothy, who is white, tried to buy their house, she ran into an unexpected obstacle.

"I came home one day and she was terribly upset," says Wilson. "When I questioned her, I found out she was upset because the seller of the house had called and he wanted to back off the sale because he had learned that she was married to this black judge. I said, 'don't worry about it.' " He had already signed a contract.

"I called this man — this was in 1961 or '62 — and said, 'Mr. so-and-so, I understand that there's a problem with the purchase of your home and I don't understand what the problem is.' He said, 'Oh no, Judge, there's no problem, you're not colored.'

"I said, 'You're misinformed.' Apparently, he knew that she was married to a black man but didn't know it was me. Then he began to tell me how he had promised his neighbors that he was going to keep the neighborhood up and this sort of thing. I didn't listen long before I said, 'We have a valid contract. You must remember that I was a lawyer before I became a judge and my wife is a lawyer and we will have the property.' "

And they did.

Today, notes Wilson, researchers have named Oakland the "most integrated city in America", a designation with which the mayor is in agreement.

"It was a gradual process of evolution," Wilson says. "Today, Oakland is a place where people come together. People are able to live together here in relative peace and harmony. Here's a city made up predominantly of ethnic minorities and there aren't any pockets that are all white or all black. Throughout the city whether it's one of these

substantially black areas, there are whites, Asians or Hispanics living among them. The same is true up in the hills area which at one time was all white.

"This hasn't happened in a revolutionary manner," says Wilson. "It's the development by process of evolution, by people getting to know each other and to work with each other and to play with each other over a period of years."

Wilson acknowledges the city's ills. He says foremost among them is the drug problem, the city's failing public schools, unemployment among its youth and the shortage of affordable housing for low-income people. He believes a major part of the solution to all of these problems is attracting new industry, dollars and jobs to Oakland. Another factor, he suggests, is inspiring a new philosophy among the city's black youth. "It's important I think for our children, our youth, to learn that school is not important simply because adults tell you it's important," says Wilson.

"It seems like 12 years is a long time, but when you apply it to 70 years, that's one-sixth of your life roughly. So, what's going to happen to you the rest of your life basically is determined to a substantial extent by how you apply yourself in school now. That's where the change is going to have to come from, our children." ■

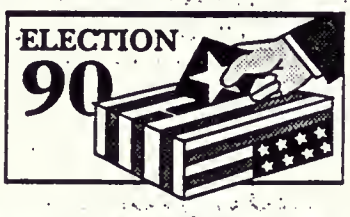
Charles C. Hardy is an Examiner *staff writer.*

Appendix K
Oakland Tribune
May 16, 1990

Undaunted, Lionel Wilson faces toughest election fight

This is the fourth in a series of profiles of candidates in the Oakland mayoral race. Today: Lionel Wilson.

By Brian Johns
The Tribune



Ten rows behind the Golden State Warriors' bench, Oakland Mayor Lionel Wilson watches point guard Tim Hardaway take it to the Dallas Mavericks.

With his back to the basket, Hardaway yo-yos the basketball in his left hand and bumps his man in. Suddenly, he switches hands, pivots and charges into the key.

Contemptuous of the giants around him, Hardaway explodes toward blue sky and backboard, banking in the the ball for two points. The muscular rookie wheels around and half-trots, half-swaggers back upcourt.

"Tough kid," Wilson says.

At 75 years of age, the former baseball and basketball player turned lawyer and judge, is known as a pretty tough cookie himself. With an acid tongue and an occasional piercing stare, Wilson is not easily rebuffed. He'll cajole, browbeat or bully, whatever it takes to win.

"He's a very difficult man to say 'No' to," said Mary King, Alameda County supervisor and chairman of Wilson's re-election campaign.

"And that regularly translates into five votes. It's like you don't want him to be displeased with you. And it's not just me that thinks that."

Still, it remains to be seen if Wilson can turn aside this year's field of mayoral challengers, the toughest he has faced during his 12 years in office.

He's currently limping through a re-election campaign hamstrung by defections, and the twin losses of a campaign treasurer as well as a recently hired campaign manager.

Wilson admits he's having trouble raising money for his war chest. And 31,000 signatures gathered in opposition to a multimillion dollar proposal to bring back the Raiders — a proposal which he belatedly but wholeheartedly supported — has given Wilson a lot to deal with.

Topping his political problems are some pressing issues: an estimated billion dollars in damages from the Loma Prieta earthquake, poorer neighborhoods clamoring for "more balanced" development, richer neighbor-

See WILSON, Page C-2

Continued from Page C-1

hoods demanding no development, little affordable housing, a short-staffed police force, a crack plague, shoddy schools, and a local tax base in need of enhanced revenue from retail sales.

But he maintains that he's the only man who can do the job, the only man who can pull together a majority of the city council.

"If I felt there was anybody out there who could do the job, and get elected, I wouldn't be running," he said.

Wilson is proud of Oakland and how far it's progressed during his tenure.

The Port of Oakland, whose commissioners are appointed by the mayor, long ago passed San Francisco's and has become one of the top cargo facilities on the West Coast. The areas of Chinatown, Piedmont, Fruitvale and College Avenue are overrun with shoppers. And downtown, a new federal building is coming in to join the City Center and the sprouting American President Lines building.

The mayor has on several occasions said he's running to complete the city's rebirth, particularly by shepherding through a proposed $300 million downtown retail center.

"I have a vision of a regional shopping center that will serve the needs of the people who live in a city this size, a shopping center that will, over a period of time, develop a retail sales tax base and help solidify and strengthen the income base of the city," Wilson said.

But he's being increasingly criticized for ignoring the city's less well-off neighborhoods. And some community-based organizations also claim the city's minorites aren't getting a piece of the development pie.

"There's been great growth downtown, but there's a feeling among people in the community that none of that growth is for him or her," said David Glover, executive director of Oakland Citizens Committee for Urban Renewal (OCCUR).

"The city seems to have maximized its participation as far as the political process, but it has far from maximized its participation as far as the right to work and participate on the economic side of the equation," he said.

Even when Wilson has brought in the traditionally "locked-out," the participants have often had more political clout than expertise, critics say.

The most recent example they point to is attorney Zachary Wasserman. Wasserman recently resigned from his position as the mayor's official campaign treasurer after it was disclosed that Wasserman had financial stakes in two high-profile city projects.

Wilson claims he didn't know about Wasserman's involvement.

He also said he knows that developers, hunting for city business, often look for people who are politically well-connected. But Wilson refuses to shoulder any responsibility, saying it's something developers do on their own.

"This isn't a matter of the mayor feeding these people with a developer here and a developer there," he said.

Wilson said that because he knows so many people, his relationships sometimes come back to haunt him. But his judicial bent and sense of loyalty will not let him cut loose a friend unless there's real evidence of wrongdoing.

"Sometimes what happens is I read a long stream of allegations in the paper, then nothing seems to happen," Wilson said.

"Knowing how stringent the federal government is about the misuse of public funds, it raises a question in my mind as to the validity of the accusations when I don't see the government taking any action."

As for affirmative action and increased minority participation, Wilson points out that 59 percent of the city's 3,259 full-time employees are minorities, and 31 percent are female.

In 1977, minorities and women made up 42 percent and 24 percent, respectively, of a 3,763-member work force.

And of $49 million in city contracts awarded during the 1989 fiscal year, minority-owned businesses pulled in $20 million worth and women-owned companies grabbed $3.7 million.

Wilson is often criticized for his out-of-the-limelight style of governing. While San Francisco Mayor Art Agnos was grabbing headlines during the Oct. 17 earthquake, Wilson kept a low profile, letting the various department heads do their jobs while keeping himself well-informed.

When West Oaklanders demanded that the fallen Cypress overpass not be rebuilt where it had stood, Wilson got on the phone with Sam Skinner, the federal transportation secretary, to see what could be done...

"It's just the way I do things. The guy who's out there making the most noise isn't necessarily getting the most done," he said.

As he stands and prepares to leave the Coliseum Arena, many other basketball fans come over to greet him. Wilson smiles, shakes hands, looks directly into their eyes.

As he heads toward the parking lot, he's smiling.

"Great game wasn't it?" he asks.

Then he spins on his heel and is gone.

Friday: Dezie Woods-Jones

Appendix L
San Francisco Examiner
December 30, 1990

Wilson leaves Oakland a much-changed city

Former judge looks back on accomplishments of 13 years as mayor

By Charles C. Hardy
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

OAKLAND — When Lionel J. Wilson took office as mayor in June 1977, it was not a position he had long aspired to.

"I never had ambitions for a political career," said Wilson, the city's 46th mayor and the first black elected to that post. "I guess it was just a matter of having been on the (judicial) bench over 16 years and needing a new challenge, and having the opportunity to do something with this city was an opportunity I couldn't turn down."

On Friday, Wilson, 76, leaves an office in a city that has changed dramatically since he took over as mayor. For example, when he became mayor, the City Council was predominantly male and white, as were most city departments and city commissions.

Today, the council consist of one black woman, two white women, one Asian man, one white man and three black men. Thirteen of the city's 20 department heads are minorities, including four women, and the city's work force is dramatically more reflective of the city's ethnic composition.

"The thing I take the most pride in is bringing about a representative government and a participatory government, where people

◆ *WILSON from B-1*

Wilson leaves a different city

throughout the neighborhoods are involved," Wilson said.

He began by lobbying the council to ban the appointment of people to more than one board or commission at the same time, except under special circumstances. Wilson said at the time he found people serving on three or four boards simultaneously, limiting the number of people allowed to participate.

Wilson, who was born in Louisiana but grew up in predominantly black West Oakland and is the son of a postal worker, like many blacks found that his ambitions often flew in the face of convention.

At a relatively young age, for example, he decided he wanted to be a lawyer. His parents and uncle dissuaded him, pointing out that there weren't any black lawyers in what was then a largely segregated Oakland.

But Wilson, who attended UC-Berkeley and Hastings School of Law, pursued his legal studies, although his parents thought for a time he was engaged in a more acceptable course — becoming a dentist.

After practicing law for 10 years, Wilson was appointed by then-Gov. Pat Brown to the Alameda County Municipal Court, becoming the county's first black judge. Later, he served on the Superior Court and became the presiding judge.

For many, the political emergence of Wilson in the late 1970s was an acceptable political change. In the previous mayoral election, Black Panther Party co-founder Bobby Seale had come surprisingly close to unseating Republican Mayor John H. Reading, reflecting the city's growing black population.

Wilson was seen as a more moderate, establishment-based black leader.

That image lingered through much of his tenure. To many blacks, he was considered more a mayor for downtown and the affluent hill interests than for the common, working minority.

But Wilson saw himself as a mayor who held the city together during a tumultuous era of change and post-Proposition 13 tax-cutting, a mayor who brought blacks, Hispanics and Asians into the mainstream of city life. Wilson also saw himself as someone who served the city in totality by luring business — and jobs — and advancing its port.

He says Mayor-elect Elihu Harris must now take the next step.

"I hope Mayor Harris would be able to advance the development of some of our neighborhoods, some of our streets like East 14th, San Pablo and MacArthur and Seventh Street," Wilson said. "I would hope that some of those streets can be revived in many ways, commercially and residentially. They've become quite depressing, slums."

Wilson, who lost much favor over the failed effort to return the Raiders football team back to Oakland and finished third in the June primary behind Harris and Councilman Wilson Riles Jr., said upgrading neighborhoods was the next thing on his agenda after working to attract major projects to downtown.

"Over the next four years, the development of downtown will occur, that's already been set in motion," Wilson said. "Hopefully Mayor Harris will be able to carry out the rehabilitation of those streets. That's the next frontier."

But, Wilson says, Harris will face difficulty finding needed government subsidies for small businesses as well as finding people interested in developing small businesses.

The most difficult problem he leaves behind is that of youth unemployment, especially among blacks and Hispanics, Wilson said.

"It's just a tremendously difficult problem," he said. "We were making some headway before CETA (the federal Comprehensive Education and Training Act) went out. We had a good program here. Because so many of these young people come out of homes lacking stability, having little guidance or discipline and the parents are unable to give them the support they need in schools, they end up dropping out and being out on the street functionally illiterate.

"And this is in a society where there is an increasingly small pool of unskilled jobs. Small wonder when something like cocaine — the drug that really activated and brought out the kind of drug problem that we have — comes along, that these kids get involved. When just by acting as lookouts they can make more money than their parents, what it's done to our kids, to their thinking, their attitudes, their character is disastrous."

In retirement, Wilson will attempt in at least a small way to combat the problem. He is working with Superior Court Judge Gordon Baranca to reopen the old YMCA building on Market and Broadhurst streets so West Oakland youngsters will have a place for recreation.

Wilson also will work part time with the Judicial Arbitration and Mediation Service, a private group of retired jurists who are assigned civil cases to help with the backlog in the court system.

He is looking forward to relaxing, too. An avid tennis player, Wilson said he plans to take up golf as well.

Wilson said he will look back on his career fondly:

"I must say that I've been blessed, not only with good health, but support from the majority of the City Council and the support of the people."

Appendix M
San Francisco Chronicle
August 13, 1991

Wilson Won't Fight to Stay on Port Board

By Rick DelVecchio
Chronicle East Bay Bureau

Former Oakland Mayor Lionel Wilson yesterday urged the city not to fight a judge's order ousting him from the Oakland Port Commission.

"There are several holes in the opinion," Wilson said in an interview. "I don't believe the opinion would stand up on appeal."

But he said an appeal does not make sense because it would drag the city through a two-year legal fight.

In a written statement, Wilson insisted that the issue of whether City Council members or the mayor can do double duty as port commissioners was "clearly not determined" by Alameda County Superior Court Judge James R. Lamden's decision last week throwing him off the panel.

Lamden ruled that the city charter makes it illegal for council members and the mayor to hold other municipal offices. And he said there is no reason to exclude the port commission from the ban against self-appointment.

Even though the Port of Oakland is an independent body and its commission is created by the city charter rather than by politicians, the prohibition is warranted, Lamden said.

Lamden said such policies are "fundamental to the effective exercise of democratic government throughout the state."

Wilson said he would not respond to Lamden's legal points. Instead, he recounted that he had asked the City Council to appoint him to the commission on the basis of two opinions by the city attorney suggesting that such a move would be legal.

The former mayor recalled an oral opinion by the city's legal counsel about four years ago, when the mayor was considering nominating Councilman Frank Ogawa to the port commission. He also noted a written opinion in 1988, on the question of his own nomination.

Wilson, who nominated himself for a seat on the commission 13 months ago after a humiliating third-place finish in his run for a fourth mayoral term, noted that commissioners work long hours for low pay in a critical function of city government. (Port commissioners are unpaid volunteers.)

He added that the mayor and council should have "a much closer working relationship" with the commission, arguing that the appointment of one council member to the board could serve that purpose.

Wilson's removal from the commission was the result of a lawsuit by the Alameda County Central Labor Council. Labor leaders feared that Wilson would tilt the port toward investments in real estate rather than in maritime operations that would preserve union jobs.

Owen Marron, the labor council's executive secretary-treasurer, said Wilson's statement yesterday rehashed arguments already rejected in court.

"It would seem to me he's just trying to obfuscate a clear legal decision," he said. "Sounds like the mayor just doesn't want to face the facts."

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March 1992

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